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# African-American Single Mothers' Experiences While Furthering Their Education

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN SINGLE MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES WHILE FURTHERING  
THEIR EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Education and Human Sciences

by  
Kimberly R. James  
B.A., Tougaloo College, 2004  
M.S., Mississippi College, 2012  
December 2016

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## **ABSTRACT**

The government has expressed the importance of a postsecondary education for career advancement, and they have displayed the income increase and rate of return between postsecondary degrees and a high school diploma. Due to the benefits of income and career advancement with a postsecondary education, more women are enrolling in colleges and universities, especially African-American single mothers; however, the graduation rate with this group is low. Little research concentrated on the experiences of African-American single mothers while obtaining their postsecondary education, and more research has focused on the connection between the women and stereotypes that followed the race since slavery. The purpose of this study is to negate the stereotypical perceptions of African-American single mothers and to prove that some of them are motivated to obtain their postsecondary education for the betterment of their children. This study investigated the experiences of African-American single mothers while persisting in postsecondary education for career advancement and financial stability for their children. This qualitative study centered Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy, and it consisted of eight participants between the ages of 26-59 who were teenage mothers and graduated with a postsecondary education; furthermore, the narratives from the participants will detail the barriers and external supports faced while persisting in their postsecondary education. Several themes and sub-themes were identified from the narratives to show similarities with the participants' experiences.

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

The government has stressed the importance of pursuing a postsecondary education for career advancement and to avoid living with a low-income or in poverty. President Barack Obama's investment was evident in initiating a "\$12 billion-dollar bill to increase the assistance to the nation's community colleges" (Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2012, p. 1); in addition, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that an income increase based on a postsecondary degree further supports the need of a postsecondary education. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), people with "bachelor's degrees gross \$459 more weekly, and master's degrees receive \$663 more weekly than people with high school diplomas; furthermore, those with professional degrees make \$1052 more weekly, and doctoral degrees acquire \$945 more weekly than people with high school diplomas" (p. 1). Noting the differences between earned wages and postsecondary education, the government's assertion that obtaining a postsecondary education for career advancement is beneficial to an increase in income. Earning a postsecondary education for career advancement traditionally involves a return on the investment in the degree, although the return of investment varies based on field of study. Engineering majors having the highest return of "21 percent and math and computer majors earning 18 percent" (Abel and Deitz, 2014, p. 7); moreover, health and business majors ranked high in return of investment.

Despite the benefits of postsecondary education, African-Americans lag behind Whites with enrollment in college classes. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), the number of White students enrolling in a college or university to earn a bachelor's degree is "1,167,499 compared to African-American students at 164,844 in 2009" (p. 1), and only a small number of single mothers graduate with a degree. More than "43% of female students are single mothers, and women of color have the highest percentage of raising children

while pursuing a postsecondary degree” (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2014, p. 1-2); however, only “one quarter of single mothers have a college degree, and one-sixth have not completed high school” (Casey, 2012, p. 1). Several reasons create this imbalance including prolonged completion of coursework and delayed college enrollment. However, these causes are only the first layer of the barrier to graduation for African-American single mothers, whose graduation rate is much lower than White female counterparts. Deeper barriers, such as marginalization and stereotypes, income, child-care, and financial aid prevent single mothers from graduating with their college degree.

### **Barriers for Single Mothers Entering College**

Unplanned pregnancies are roughly “41% in the United States” (Sweeney & Raley, 2014, p.542), and the numbers vary among races. African-American women are disproportionately represented in unplanned pregnancies, as “72% of unmarried births were from African-American women compared to 54% of births to Hispanic women and roughly 29% of recent births to White women” (Sweeney & Raley, 2014, p.542). More unplanned pregnancies come from African-American women than other groups, and African-American teenage girls have higher rates when compared to White adolescent girls. According to Hamilton & Ventura (2012), the birth rates for African-American girls were “51.5 per 1,000 compared to 23.5 per 1,000 for White teenage girls” (p. 2). Unplanned pregnancies are considered a social and economic disadvantage, because the mothers are at “risk for poverty and low paternal involvement; in addition, it could impair mental health and reduce opportunities for educational and vocational development” (Kogan et al., 2013, p.15). Unplanned pregnancies are expensive to government and taxpayers; the current estimate of the total of “U.S. costs of unintended pregnancy —

conservatively estimated here to be \$4.6 billion annually — by identifying the portion of those costs that is due to imperfect adherence to contraceptive methods” (Finer & Sonfield, 2012, p. 126).

Low-income, single-mother families are steadily rising; the percentage of these households increased from “54 percent in 2007 to 58 percent in 2012 and the race with the highest percentage is African-Americans” (Covert, 2014, p. 1). Families are low-income if their “taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p.2), and they worked full-time jobs, but their pay did not cover most of their financial obligations, especially the costs and fees of a college education. Additionally, low income jobs offer inflexible scheduling, which hinders workers from taking required courses at college because of time conflicts. Paid time off at most low income jobs is not required and depends upon the number of hours worked; to qualify for the Family Medical Leave Act benefits, employees have to work at least “1,250 hours in the previous year to care for themselves or family members” (Heinrich, 2014, p. 136). Because of the importance of providing for their children, low-income single mothers often sacrifice their education desires.

Many African-American single-mother families earn low wages, and some accept government assistance to cover economic needs, and must focus on working instead of pursuing a college degree. The government developed Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program required states to create welfare programs for low-income families that forced them to gain employment immediately. Since this program concentrated on the importance of working, “the participants’ access to higher education was restricted and single mothers were discouraged from recognizing the significance of higher education for upward mobility” (Katz, 2013, p. 275); this program mandated low paying jobs to single mothers and involuntarily made them rely on

public assistance. However, if able to obtain degrees, single mothers and their children would benefit, their incomes would increase, and their children would be influenced to graduate from college and better their lives.

Another government program that hinders single mothers from earning a college degree is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The SNAP program “offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities” (United States Department of Agriculture, 2016, p. 1). However, the application process requires completion of paperwork and continued visits to a government representative for recertification, which could cause an interruption with attending classes and the completion of coursework. If government aid is minimized, single mothers might choose to work instead of furthering their education.

Not all African-American single mothers come from impoverished backgrounds; however, they still struggle with low income due to wage gaps and unequal pay. African-Americans also suffer from the racial wealth gap due to racial labor markets, because the “median wealth of White families was \$113,149 compared with \$6,325 for Latino families and \$5,677 for Black families, and the total wealth gap between White and African-American families nearly tripled, increasing from \$85,000 in 1984 to \$236,500 in 2009” (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013, p. 1). Additionally, a wage gap exists with income increases between African-Americans and Whites, because “every dollar increase in average income over the 25-year study period added \$5.19 wealth for White households, while the same income gain only added 69 cents of wealth for African American households” (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013, p. 4). The diminished wealth potential of African-Americans lessens their ability to support their families.

Along with the wealth gap, a wage gap exists that is based on race and gender; African-American women earn less than White women, because “African-American women earn \$13 hourly while White women earn \$17 hourly” (Patten, 2016, p. 2). Data from the American Association of University Women (2016) documented the median annual pay of African-American women and White women; African-American women earned \$33,772 while White women earned \$41,585 (p. 10). Due to discrimination in the workforce because of race and gender, African-American single mothers who are considered middle-class still suffer from lack of income.

Another barrier single mothers face is tuition and fee costs; they do not receive enough financial aid and grants to cover all expenses at a college and accumulate substantial amounts of debt before enrolling in a university. Based on their income, their expected family contributions indicate that they do not need a large amount of financial aid for college. The Federal Pell Grant Program is the “single largest source of need-based financial aid for college students in the United States, providing over \$32 billion in grants to nearly 9 million undergraduates” (Schudde & Clayton, 2014, p. 1), and it is focused on awarding students with financial assistance for college; however, students are only eligible if they meet the satisfactory academic progress (SAP) requirements. The SAP requirements for the Pell Grant are:

Students maintain a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher and to complete at least two thirds of the course credits that they attempt. Those who fail to meet the SAP requirements at the end of the institution’s evaluation period may continue to receive aid for one additional term, but if they are still failing SAP at the end of that term, they may lose eligibility for Pell. (Schudde & Clayton, 2014, p. 1)

Because of the strict academic requirements of the Pell Grant, students run the risk of losing that financial aid.



Since single mothers have few options, they accept the financial aid, but they still have an “average annual unmet need of \$6,117 compared to \$3,650 for non-parent students, and \$3,289 for married parents” (Nelson, Froehner, & Gault, 2013, p. 3). Because of the debt they accrue during their college years, single mothers often decide to withdraw from school. Although they make that final choice, “they still have college debt, and it averages to \$8,138” (Nelson, Froehner, & Gault, 2013, p. 4).

In addition to college fees, a stressor is sufficient childcare while attending courses. Single mothers who are the sole caretakers for their children and “spend large amounts of time caring for children, and they are twice as likely to spend at least 30 hours per week caring for children” (Gault, Reichlin, & Roman, 2014, p. 14). Since most of their time is devoted to caring for their children, their time is strained for completion of higher education. The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, a government established program for working families, gives a partial refund to families for childcare expenses. However, those credits only favor families who owe large taxes. Moreover, the cost of “employer-provided dependent care is excluded from taxable income, another form of public child support for child care that is not targeted to low-income families” (Heinrich, 2014, p. 134). Furthermore, colleges and universities rarely offer childcare for parents on campus; some colleges have childcare programs on campus but they are unaffordable and unavailable. The “average costs of child care range from \$3,900 to \$15,000 a year depending on location, quality, and a child’s age, and the number of child care slots serve only five percent of total student parent need for child care; also, several child care providers have waiting lists ranging from 90 days to two years” (Gault, Reichlin, & Roman, 2014, p. 15). Most single mothers have trouble affording childcare as a college student, and they work to afford it.

Many African-American single mothers cope with child rearing without the paternal parent being involved, and this lack of help places additional financial and emotional strain on the mother and may incur emotional problems for the child. According to Gonzalez, Jones, & Parent (2014), the “majority of African American youth are raised in single parent households, most single mother-headed, at some point during childhood and/or adolescence” (p. 33), and one of the reasons for this rise is unplanned pregnancies. African-American women had the highest rate of unplanned pregnancies; research discovered that “79 per 1,000 women aged 15–44 had unwed pregnancies, more than double that of non-Hispanic White women (33 per 1,000)” (Guttmacher Institute, 2016, p. 1).

Many African-American women raise their children without the biological father present, because the fathers are from impoverished areas and suffer from “financial insecurity or uncertainty over the skills required for childcare, particularly for babies and younger children” (Clayton, 2016, p. 132); because of financial instability, they tend to consider themselves inept in caring for a child and remove themselves from the situation. Some fathers are incarcerated and do not have the ability to physically or financially be present in their child’s life, because “at least 30% of fathers of children born to adolescent mothers were in prison” (Pinzon & Jones, 2012, p. e1746), and some are unaware of the mother’s pregnancy until after the birth. Due to the father’s absence, many single mothers must find ways to care for their child(ren) alone.

African-American women are subjected to intersectionality due to race and gender, and stereotypes that were attributed to their ancestors during slavery adhere in the present. Bowleg (2012) defined intersectionality as:

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how multiple social identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, social economic status, and disability

intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism) at the macro social-structural level (p. 1267).

Research revealed that Black men and women were judged as more “masculine and race stereotypical than same-sex White targets, and sex categorization errors were more common for Black women than any other race/sex combination” (Johnson, Pauker, & Freeman, 2012, p. 117). African-American women suffer from the stereotypes of “matriarchs, mammies, welfare mothers, and jezebels, and they portray Black women as sexually other: either uncontrollably sexual or abnormally asexual and emasculating” (Wilkins, 2012, p. 174-175). The media promotes the stereotypes of African-American women instead of showing the advancements of the women. Because of the stereotypes of African-American women, they are marginalized and treated unequally.

African-American single mothers endure discrimination based on race and gender, and single motherhood adds to intersectionality. In 1965, sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s Moynihan Report described African-American single mothers as “ghetto women who encouraged and glorified out-of-wedlock birth” (Chaney & Brown, 2016, p. 15). Furthermore, President Ronald Reagan’s depicted African-American single mothers as welfare queens and categorized them as “lazy, promiscuous, the primary recipients of public aid, and deserving of their lot in life” (Chaney & Brown, 2016, p. 16). The welfare queen persona evolved into baby mama label for African-American single mothers, a term that originated from their culture because African-American men recognized them as “freaky, sleazy, scandalous, cold-hearted, revengeful, and lazy gold diggers and drama queens” (Chaney & Brown, 2016, p. 18). These negative stereotypes that surfaced from their own race caused African-American single mothers to be subjected to oppression and hatred by society.

African-American women endure health issues due to oppression and marginalization; research indicated that they have “higher cancer mortality rates than Whites, and Blacks are also more likely to develop high blood pressure, which leads to increased cardiovascular disease in this population” (Bronder, Speight, Witherspoon, & Thomas, 2013, p. 116). African-American women suffer from depression or depressive symptomology more than White women; they are unlikely to seek treatment, because it would negate the perception of them being strong and capable and able to rise above the discrimination. Some depression symptoms that African-American women experience are “anxiety, paranoia, sleep difficulties, lack of confidence, worthlessness, intrusive cognitions, helplessness, loss of drive, and false positives, which are the overgeneralization of negative experiences with others due to persistent feelings of harassment” (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015, p. 166).

### **Programs Promoting Postsecondary Education Completion for Single Mothers**

College and university graduation rates are low, and personal and academic reasons are the culprits. Research determined that “college students face multiple challenges while persisting in postsecondary education, and some are inadequate academic preparation, competing obligations to work and family, and limited experience navigating the complexities of collegiate systems and requirements” (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013, p. 94). Colleges and universities have created programs to assist single mothers with completing their postsecondary education to counteract the faltering graduation rate. Services include “peer mentoring, memory and concentration skill building, early academic progress and warning monitoring, faculty mentoring, freshman seminar courses, group learning, proactive advising, time management workshops, and tutoring” (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013, p. 103).

One approach to increasing the graduation rate for single mothers is academic advising; advisors provide resources that single mothers can access to succeed in their studies and inform them about ways to improve their academic achievement while pursuing their postsecondary education. Some academic advisors connect single mothers with mentors who provide remediation services. Remediation mentoring programs “increased students’ use of the campus tutoring center and reduced the likelihood that they would withdraw from the course” (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013, p. 104). Another mentoring program that indicated educational achievement with single mothers was InsideTrack; it connected students with academic coaches, and these coaches “called students and aggressively maintained contact. Like the advisers in other studies, InsideTrack coaches focused on information, study skills, motivation, and time management” (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013, p. 104). Academic advising is helpful to single mothers, but additional supports unrelated to education are needed.

Childcare is major issue faced by single mothers completing their postsecondary education, and “53 percent of students aged twenty-two to thirty with at least some college coursework said that family commitments were a major reason why they could not complete a degree or return to college” (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013, p. 105). Colleges and universities offer scholarships specifically for low-income single mothers, because “financial aid determination is based on the needs of single students without children” (Graham & Bassett, 2012, p. 9). One such scholarship is performance-based and gives single mothers “\$1,000 per semester if they earn at least six credits and a ‘C’ average” (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013, p. 106). Single mothers responded positively about this scholarship, in part because they could use the money for childcare expenses. Some community-based organizations and community college campuses “offer housing and other support to single mothers pursuing postsecondary

education” (Thorman, Otto, & Gunn-Wright, 2012, p.1). In addition to housing, these institutions offer child and emergency care while the mothers attend classes.

Single mothers looking to further their education and obtain a college degree may encounter blocks that could deter them. Although some institutions provide supports, the low graduation rate of single mothers is a concern. Much information is available that explains why it is they fail to complete their higher education studies. This study focused on personal narratives that described the struggles of African-American single mothers with the intent that institutions could use these narratives to adapt and develop programs that would assist them with attaining success. Furthermore, recognizing supports for single mothers who achieved their college degree provides recommendations to institutions on how to adjust their initiatives to ensure that their strategies are beneficial and successful. Without these personal accounts, single mothers will continue to prolong or never pursue postsecondary education.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

The number of single mothers enrolling in college has increased; “4.8 million college students were parents of dependent children in 2011, and 71 percent were women” (White, 2010, p. 2). Although the number has increased, only “18 percent had at least a bachelor’s degree” (Legal Momentum, 2014, p. 1), and others withdraw from college within six years. Despite many single mothers entering college, the concern emerges about why the graduation rate is low. Income appears to be the main factor that causes single mothers to abandon their educational goals.

Poverty is defined as a “family whose income is below the established national threshold” (UNESCO, 2016, p. 1). The 2011 report on the poverty threshold cited the threshold “totaled an amount of \$17, 916 for a family of three” (Casey & Maldonado, 2012, p. 26). Many

African-American single mother families live in poverty, which has been an issue for two decades:

The official rate for single mother families fluctuated between 40 percent and 48 percent in each year from 1966 to 1997. The rate fell below 40 percent for the first time to 39 percent in 1998, and then declined to 36 percent in 1999 and to 33 percent in 2000. After 2000, the rate increased for ten straight years, reaching 41 percent in 2010, and then remaining at 41 percent in 2011. (Casey & Maldonado, 2012, p. 26-27).

Single-mother households have almost doubled compared to two-parent families, for in “2011, the poverty rate was 9 percent for two-parent families and 22 percent for single father families, compared to the 41 percent rate for single mother families” (Casey & Maldonado, 2012, p. 27).

Single mothers face hardships, and increased numbers are enrolling in college to better their situation through career advancement. “4.8 million single parents attended college, and 59 percent of these students were single parent women” (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2014, p. 1)

Although poverty is a factor that hinders African-American single mothers from pursuing a postsecondary education, another factor is the wealth gap among social classes, race, and gender. According to McKernan, Ratcliffe, Steuerle, & Zhang (2013), the gap in wealth disparity has widened:

High-wealth families (the top 20 percent by net worth) saw their average wealth increase by nearly 120 percent between 1983 and 2010, while middle-wealth families saw their average wealth go up by only 13 percent. The lowest-wealth families— those in the bottom 20 percent—saw their average wealth fall well below zero, meaning their average debts exceed their assets. (p.1)

Wealth inequality is prevalent among races; Whites earn more than African-Americans. In 2010, Whites had “six times the wealth of Blacks and Hispanics, meaning for every \$6.00 Whites had in wealth, Blacks and Hispanics had \$1.00” (McKernan, Ratcliffe, Steuerle, & Zhang, 2013, p. 1); moreover, the income gap is narrower among races, for the “average income for Whites was

twice that of blacks and Hispanics (\$89,000 versus \$46,000), meaning that for every \$2.00 Whites earned, Blacks and Hispanics earned \$1.00” (McKernan et al., 2013, p. 1).

According to Ruel & Hauser (2013), single-female households receive less wealth than traditional and single-male families.

Some have found that single-headed households accumulate less wealth than married households. Others find that single male-headed households and cohabitating households differ little from traditional married households in wealth accumulation. However, some found that male-headed and female-headed households with at least one child accumulate 9 % and 15 % less wealth, respectively, than do married-parent households. A number of researchers have found that single women with children have the lowest overall asset levels. (p. 1157)

Also, single-family households generally accumulate less income compared to traditional families. Additionally, income discrepancies are evident between White and African-American women, for the median earning for White women is “\$28, 674 compared to African-American women being \$25, 705” (Schneider, 2013, p. 23). These differences between Whites’ and African-Americans’ wealth and income create a more difficult situation for African-American women to financially support their child(ren).

More adequate financial aid for college attendance is needed. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), the cost for tuition and fees have risen for the past ten years:

The annual cost for undergraduate tuition, including room and board, was estimated to be \$15, 022 at public institutions, \$39, 173 at private nonprofit institutions, and \$23,158 at private for-profit institutions for the 2012-2013 academic year. The prices for undergraduate tuition, room, and board rose to 39 percent at public institutions and 27 percent at private nonprofit institutions because of inflation. (p. 4).

These costs focus on tuition, room, and board and do not include additional fees and the costs of books. Single mothers may generate less than \$37,000 of income; if they pay tuition, \$22,000 is left for other educational fees, childcare costs, and general living expenses. If they graduate from



college, the accumulated debt may be in excess of \$30,000, and they will incur more debt if they pursue advanced degrees.

Financial aid and grants for single mothers are available; however, these monetary supports are based on eligibility, and they usually do not cover the full cost of a college education. Budget cuts limit educational help. The Income Protection Allowance is available to assist with some college costs; however, the “House Fiscal Year 2013 budget would cut Pell Grants by roughly \$24 billion over 20 years for millions of students already struggling to cover living expenses and rising college costs” (The Institute for College Access and Success, 2012, p.1).

Single mothers need assistance with childcare. Childcare is one of the biggest expenses for them, for the “average annual price of full-time care for an infant in a child care center ranges from \$4,600 in Mississippi to \$15,000 in Massachusetts” (Minton & Durham, 2013, p. 1). Single mothers can receive subsidies from the government for childcare; however, eligibility is income dependent and the income limit varies by state; if salary exceeds the requirements, childcare funding is cancelled. Additionally, incomplete recertification processes will eliminate them from receiving government money.

Another factor that could stop single mothers from getting childcare assistance is limited funding from the states or “the removal of a family from priority to non-priority under TANF and placed on a waiting list” (Minton & Durham, 2013, p. 5). With higher education underfunded by the government, most colleges and universities are unable to provide childcare for single mothers. Institutions that offer childcare are limited to the number of children they can accept, which may cause single mothers to be placed on a waiting list. The Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program offers funding for childcare based on Pell Grant awards;

however, “the enrollment verification requirements that accompany this funding often make it difficult for parents to pay for child care until after the first few weeks of class-weeks which are critical to course success and persistence” (Gioiosa & McCambly, 2015, p. 3-4). Although some literature concentrates on the institutional and economic barriers that deter single mothers from pursuing their educational career, little literature explains the supports and motivation that help African-American single mothers graduate from college and continue earning advanced degrees. Researchers need to focus on the achievements of these women as role models and motivators for succeed for others.

African-American women’s children experience more paternal absence in their lives more than any other race, and the women rely on family and community supports as resources for childcare. According to Child Trends (2015), “72% of non-marital births are from African-American women compared to 29% for White women; likewise, only 35% of African-American women have non-marital births in cohabiting unions compared to 68% of White cohabiting unions” (p. 2). One reason for father absence is incarceration, for “60% of people of color are imprisoned but only make up 30% of the population, and 1 in every 15 African American men and 1 in every 36 Hispanic men are incarcerated in comparison to 1 in every 106 white men” (Center for American Progress, 2012, p. 2). Imprisoned African-American fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives is limited, and the relationship between the father and the mother may end. The trend of father absence after prison release often occurs because fathers “accrue child support obligations while incarcerated and leave prison with unmanageable arrears. Payment challenges may undermine visitation. In addition, mothers frequently assume a gatekeeping role limiting the time that fathers spend with their children” (Geller, 2013, p. 1291).

Some African-American fathers remove themselves from their children's lives because of the stressors of being a parent; those stressors include "limited finances, unemployment, health of the mother and baby, parenting, and maintaining a relationship with the expecting mother" (Albritton, Angley, Gibson, Sipsma, & Kershaw, 2015, p. 90). African-American fathers suffer from psychological distress because of these combined stressors:

12-month depressive symptoms are 1.5 times higher among urban African-American fathers compared to a nationally representative sample of all fathers, and rates of comorbid anxiety and substance use are also disproportionate among them; likewise, expecting adolescent fathers have higher self-reported anxiety and depression scores and are less likely to receive psychiatric or counseling services compared to expecting adult fathers. (Albritton et al., 2015, p. 90)

An absent African-American father generally causes the African-American single mother to request aid and assistance from family and community.

African-American women experience racism and sexism throughout their lives, and these factors cause intersectionality, a theory that draws "attention to the importance of multiple intersecting identities and highlights that the roots of stereotypes are in historical and contemporary systemic oppression" (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016, p. 415-416). Society has created several stereotypical views of African-American women; one is the angry Black woman, matriarch, or sapphire, an encompassing type that "presumes all Black women to be irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite the circumstances; additionally, angry Black women are typically described as aggressive, unfeminine, undesirable, overbearing, attitudinal, bitter, mean, and hell raising" (Ashley, 2014, p.28). Other images that followed African-American women from slavery to today are mammy and jezebel. Rosenthal & Lobel (2016) described them and the welfare queen:

The mammy archetype is the image of an unattractive Black mother who is strong and content in her caregiving role for many children, in the service of White slave owners or White employers. The jezebel, or sexual siren, is the image of an immoral, sexually

promiscuous, and sexually available Black woman. Another more recent archetype of Black women is that of the welfare queen, which is connected to images of Black women as breeders dating back to slavery. The welfare queen is an image of an uneducated, poor, single Black woman who does not want to work but has many children in order to take advantage of public assistance. (p. 416)

These stereotypes cause some African-American women to experience mental anguish and low self-esteem; furthermore, they often feel “unsafe and unprotected as a result of oppression and stereotyping, having anxiety linked with feelings associated with the stereotypes, and anticipating anxiety associated with projections of future stereotyping” (Ashley, 2014, p. 28). These feelings can cause despair and a feeling of incompetence in African-American women.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to acquire personal accounts of the experiences faced by African-American single mothers while pursuing postsecondary education and advancing their careers. This research identified African-American single mothers who ignored personal barriers and society’s stereotypes, excelled in postsecondary education, and obtained successful careers to better their lives and those of their children. They shared their experiences as African-American teenage mothers, and they provided detailed information about situations that occurred while attending a college or university.

African-American single mothers struggle with earning low income in addition to other economic stressors of being a single parent. According to the Center for American Progress, the “poverty rate for African-American women is 28.6 percent compared to White, non-Hispanic women, which was 10.8 percent” (Guerra, 2013, p. 4). These statistics imply that this study could be a blueprint for African-American single mothers who desire to earn a postsecondary degree; completion of a degree could contribute to lowering the poverty rate for African-American women. According to Gioiosa & McCambly (2015), the main obstacles they faced

were “financial aid packages not covering the full cost of education, inflexible work obligations, poverty, and lack of child care services” (p. 4), in addition to marginalization and stereotypes. Although faced with problems, some of the study participants earned a degree and continued with their education.

The guiding questions for this research study were:

1. What are African-American women’s experiences being a single mother?
2. What were some supports received being an African-American single mother?
3. What was African-American single mothers’ motivation to persist in college and earn their degree?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study used Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory as the research foundation; this theory explains how external supports and personal achievements could internally motivate African-American single mothers to complete their postsecondary education and establish successful careers to better care for their children. Bandura (1977) developed the theory of self-efficacy, explaining it as a theory where outcomes occur based on the thoughts of oneself; in addition, he believed that “outcome and efficacy expectations were differentiated, because individuals can believe that a particular course of action will produce certain outcomes, but if they entertain serious doubts about whether they can perform the necessary activities such information does not influence their behavior” (p. 193). This theory commences with people setting personal goals and expectations for themselves and visualizing their success, which assists with them handling situations that were not included in their plans. The more they see themselves achieving their desired goals, the more they work toward their desires; moreover, appropriate skills to assist with reaching their goals and tangible incentives, in addition to self-

motivation, will impact “how much effort they will expend and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations” (Bandura, 1977, p. 194).

The self-efficacy theory involves three dimensions of performance: magnitude, generality, and strength. Magnitude deals with the level of difficulty it takes to achieve the desired goal; likewise, the struggle to accomplish the expectation determines if “people may be limited to simpler tasks, extend to moderately hard ones, or include the most taxing performances” (Bandura, 1977, p. 194). Furthermore, self-efficacy involves generality, as some experiences may restrict the process of people succeeding their expectations where some people will continue to perform when problematic situations surface. The last component is strength, because “people who possess strong expectations of mastery will persevere in their coping efforts despite disconfirming experiences” (Bandura, 1977, p. 194). These three dimensions determine if people will master their expectations through difficulty and stress, and the level of self-motivation that their expectations regulate if they succeed or falter.

Self-efficacy has four sources: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Performance accomplishments and personal mastery are intertwined, because success in reaching goals will increase expectations, and negative situations would heighten their inspirations to succeed; additionally, once this is established, “self-efficacy tends to generalize to other situations in which performance was self-debilitated by pre-occupation with personal inadequacies” (Bandura, 1977, p. 195). This is when the coping mechanism is established with mastering the expectations; however, there must be external motivators available for self-efficacy to continue.

Vicarious experience is the second source of self-efficacy. It emphasizes the fact that people can become self-motivated by monitoring the success of others and believing that they,

too, can accomplish the same goals. The only way this source is successful is if the observed modeled behavior was fruitful; likewise, if it is effective, it “produces greater behavior improvements than witnessing the same performances modeled without any evident consequences” (Bandura, 1977, p. 197). If more people with various backgrounds accomplish their goals, self-efficacy increases within others, thus lowering the avoidance behavior of negative situations affecting mastering expectations.

The third source of self-efficacy is verbal persuasion. According to Bandura (1977), “verbal persuasion is widely used because of its ease and ready availability” (p. 198). This encouragement could help with rebuilding the coping mechanism of people who encounter negativity while working to accomplish a desired goal. Once the external support and the self-efficacy are connected, people place a greater effort on goal achievement than those who did not have transient reinforcements through the process.

Emotional arousal is the last source of self-efficacy. Arousal influences mastery of expectations and assists with dealing with negative conditions; since “high arousal usually debilitates performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are not beset by aversive arousal than if they are tense and viscerally agitated” (Bandura, 1977, p. 198). However, if undesirable thoughts about achieving the desired expectation continue, individuals may experience high levels of anxiety that could hinder them from reaching their goals. Bandura (1977) thought that appropriate modeling minimized fears and anxiety and heightened self-efficacy, and could teach coping skills for threatening situations; furthermore, “acquiring behavioral means for controlling potential threats attenuates or eliminates fear arousal” (Bandura, 1977, p. 199). The practice of managing stressful circumstances allows people to look at problems in a less threatening manner and to reduce agitation.

### **Significance of Study**

The existing literature on single mothers completing college is negative and discouraging, for it speaks to the barriers that cause them to either withdraw or prolong their educational desires, and elaborates on the low percentage of them graduating from college. Single mothers may experience unfortunate circumstances that may cause them to avoid achieving goals and aspirations. According to the Heritage Foundation (2016), “less than 15 percent of single mothers are college educated” (p. 1). Some single mothers have accomplished their postsecondary educational goals. Research needs to focus on these women and the motivational supports that helped them graduate from college and earn advanced degrees. More studies centered on single mothers’ academic successes might encourage more women to become self-determined and to reach their educational desires. Furthermore, more single mothers would follow the role models of those who endured their similar struggles, which would assist them with handling stress and negativity while working toward their college degree.

Focusing on African-American single mothers is significant in this study because they and their children suffer from income instability. They need additional external supports to help them maneuver obstacles. African-American single mothers with similar stories and who removed themselves from income restrictions give others hope and encouragement to succeed.

### **Definitions and Related Concepts**

1. Single mother- “unwed woman who birthed a child” (Parent, Jones, Forehand, Cuellar, & Shoulberg, 2013, p. 253) and receives no assistance from the father of the child, current spouse, or partner
2. Unplanned Pregnancy- “pregnancy that is reported to have been either unwanted or mistimed” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015, p. 1)



3. Low-income- “family whose taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 2), which causes limited assets and wealth
4. Poverty-lack of money “necessary to meet basic needs or falling below prevailing standards of living in a given societal context” (UNESCO, 2016, p. 1), which causes lack of resources for survival
5. Self-efficacy- “individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments” (Bandura, 1994, p. 71)
6. Wealth Gap- “measure of the difference in financial resources, or assets, between segments of society.” (Walter, 2016, p. 1)
7. Income Gap- “income is distributed in an uneven manner among a population” (Inequality.org, n.d., p.1)
8. Stereotypes- “traits that mark a well-known type, and these traits create a mental picture in people’s heads about a culture or race” (Lippmann, 1946, p. 33)
9. Marginalization- “outsider within status” (Collins, 2000, p. 268) that excludes women of color from the norms of White society
10. Intersectionality- “combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race and on the basis of sex” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149); additionally, it can be a combination of sexual orientation, religion, class, and parental status
11. Absent Father: man who fathered a child but is not active in the child’s life and parenting due to incarceration or choice of avoidance
12. Teenage pregnancy: “adolescent women who become pregnant between the ages of 13-19” (UNICEF, 2008, p. 1)

13. African-American: people who live in America with African descent

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The number of single mothers enrolling in college has increased and continues to rise. Although their increasing college enrollment, single mothers experience difficulty with higher educational attainment due to economic barriers, and many of them withdraw from their courses. Nonetheless, a number of single mothers graduate with a degree and complete advanced degrees. Studies document the struggles they endure; however, little research is available about the internal and external supports available that assist them in pursuing with their higher educational goals. This literature review covers the following topics: (a) types of single mothers, (b) impact of single parenting on African-American unmarried women and children, (c) single mothers' persistence in higher education, (d) barriers for single mothers in higher education, and (e) institutional supports for single mothers in higher education.

#### **Types of Single Mothers**

The term single mother has various meanings, and it often is applied when a woman has children and endures "parental divorce, separation, or never been married" (Golombok, Zadeh, Imrie, & Smith, 2016, p. 409). Likewise, single women who experienced childbirth during their teenage years fall under the same category. Other definitions include single heterosexual women who become pregnant due to artificial insemination or a lesbian who had insemination to start a family. Research has shown that "births to unmarried women in the US have soared since 1970, growing from approximately 10 % of all births to over 40 % today; further, over 25 % of children in the US today live with only one parent" (Ifcher & Zarghamee, 2014, p. 1220). Furthermore, unwed African-American women have the highest birthrate among other races, for "70 % of births are to unmarried women and almost half of all children live with one parent" (Ifcher & Zarghamee, 2014, p. 1220). Of this percentage, more children are born to African-

American teenage females than Caucasians, for “Black adolescent females between the ages of 15-19 years old have 39.0 births per 1,000 teenage females, whereas White female youth only has 18.6 births per 1,000” (Florescu, Temneanu, & Mindru, 2016, p. 84). Considering the high number of unplanned pregnancies of Black adolescents versus White adolescents, pregnancy preventative strategies implemented by the government have focused on African-American females as the recipients of preventative support.

### **Parenting and College Persistence**

College persistence is defined as “continued enrollment or degree completion at any higher education institution, and retention is continued enrollment or degree completion within the same higher education institution in the fall semesters of a student’s first and second year.” (National Student Clearinghouse, 2014, p. 7). Colleges struggle to maintain a high enrollment rate, and their attrition numbers continue to rise. Researchers determined that the lack of cultural and social necessities demanded for college work played an important factor with college attainment, which is connected to Pierre Bourdieu’s Theory of Social Reproduction.

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) Theory of Social Reproduction is the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 21). For college students, social capital is the “investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace. In this framing, social capital is created through social interactions and the expectations of future social resources they engender” (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014, p. 856). Single mothers can successfully pursue and complete their postsecondary education by establishing social relationships with their peers on campus. The networking bonds with single mothers are stronger when they socialize with others who share the same experiences; moreover,

forming these bonds with peers makes them feel a sense of belongingness on campus. Support from faculty and administration gives single mothers a sense of confidence and security in their studies and could promote internal motivate to complete their postsecondary education.

### **Strategies for College Success**

Colleges and universities use various strategies to promote success for single mothers completing their postsecondary education, including social media. Social media is defined as “any number of technological systems related to collaboration and community” (Tess, 2013, p. A60). Social media creates a sense of involvement on campuses. Campus events, information about various departments, and peer group meetings for tutoring and social support are a few opportunities that colleges and universities post on social media; furthermore, group emails and social media sites created by faculty and staff display support within students’ studies.

Institutions use social media as a way to “provide informational and social support for students and help them find and connect with other students” (Gray, Vitak, Easton, & Ellison, 2013, p. 194); likewise, social media gives students the opportunity to create support groups online that heighten emotional support. With colleges and universities going virtual, a social media website, such as Facebook, “enhances or extends face-to-face support networks in terms of providing greater access to the increased social capital available in a larger, easier to maintain, network of individuals who are often geographically separated” (Wright et al., 2013, p. 44). Professors use social media outlets to enhance instruction in the classrooms based on research that “social media software promotes inquiry-based approaches and collaboration, as well as active participation, learner self-direction, and personal meaning construction” (Tess, 2013, p. A62). Social media outlets create a sense of belonging and self-worth because of the community of peers who are there for academic and emotional support.

The Federal TRIO program is another strategy used to promote college enrollment and postsecondary completion. The TRIO program provides necessary support and assistance for students with a financial and an academic need. The TRIO program includes several facets under its umbrella:

Talent Search emphasizes the provision of information about college and financial aid to students in grades 6 through 12, whereas Upward Bound emphasizes academic preparation, mentoring, and assistance with college and financial aid processes for high school students. Veterans Upward Bound helps veterans improve academic readiness for college and obtain other services targeted to veterans. Educational Opportunity Centers assist displaced and underemployed adult workers from low-income families with college-going processes. The McNair program serves undergraduates who are preparing for doctoral studies and emphasizes undergraduate research experiences, mentoring, and preparation with graduate school admissions processes. (Perna, 2015, p. 3)

Single mothers can utilize the TRIO program for assistance with strategies for completing their postsecondary education and preparing their children for college. Research showed that the TRIO program is beneficial to students' achieving their college goals, for the "Student Support Services promoted persistence in college, college credit accrual, and college grades and the Talent Search increased applications for financial aid and postsecondary enrollment" (Perna, 2015, p. 3).

### **Single Mothers and College Barriers**

African-American single mothers' "college enrollment rate is 113, 905 in 2009 compared to 60,221 in 1999" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012, p. 1). Although more of these mothers are attending college, only a small number of them earn a degree, because they are faced with barriers that hinder pursuing in their educational studies. "Student parents who attend an institution part-time are even less likely to complete, and only 5.2 of student parents attain their bachelor's degree" (Huelsman & Engle, 2013, p. 4). Finances and unplanned pregnancies are among the common factors that hinder most single mothers from obtaining their college degree.

## **Unplanned Pregnancy**

Unplanned pregnancy is a “pregnancy as one that was either mistimed or unwanted” (Finer & Zolna, 2014, p. S43) and “49% of all pregnancies were reported to be unintended, and of these, 29% were mistimed, 19% were unwanted, and 43% ended in abortion” (Peipert, Madden, Allsworth, & Secura, 2012, p. 1291-1292). Unplanned pregnancies tend to be untimed and some end in abortion. There is a pattern of unplanned pregnancies in low income areas where resources are limited, and it is “higher among Blacks and Hispanics than among Whites” (Carter, Kraft, Long, & Timajchy, 2013, p. 149). Teenage pregnancy falls under the unplanned pregnancy category, because it is described as an adolescent girl being pregnant between the ages of 13-19; however, “girls as young as ten who are sexually active occasionally become pregnant and give birth, and the vast majority of teenage births in the United States occur among girls between fifteen and nineteen years of age”. (Cherry & Dillon, 2013, p. 1).

According to Trussell et al. (2013), the “total costs to US taxpayers from unintended pregnancies have been estimated to range from \$9.6 to \$12.6 billion a year, whilst annual direct medical costs have been estimated to be \$5 billion” (p. 155); additionally, teenage parenting affects society because “the total annual government expenditures on public aid to teen-mothers in 2006 were \$11.3 billion, and the costs are imposed upon taxpayers” (Patel & Sen, 2012, p. 1063). The United States taxpayers pay for the welfare of children from unplanned pregnancies although they have no affiliation with the families; furthermore, as the healthcare and wellbeing increase, higher taxes are taken from US taxpayers to supplement the funding, which causes more money to come from their households.

Unplanned pregnancies pose health and emotional risks to the mother and the child, such as “delayed prenatal care, smoking during pregnancy, not breastfeeding the baby, poorer health

during childhood, and poorer outcomes for the mother and the mother-child relationship” (Mosher, Jones, & Abma, 2012, p. 2). Due to these health risks, children have the chance of suffering from developmental or mental delays, and they are likely to repeat the cycle of unplanned pregnancies and health risks in adulthood.

Studies on the causes of unplanned pregnancies and single motherhood have been done but no concrete answers have surfaced. Investigations continued to use African-American families as the primary focus of their analyses because of Moynihan’s (1965) report that negatively portrayed the assumed lifestyles of this minority; the report “emphasized the declining economic prospects of men as an important factor leading black women to have births outside marriage” (Kearney & Levine, 2012, p. 156). Additionally, other research and extensive reviews of single mothers showed that “living in a disadvantaged neighborhood and family receipt of welfare benefits, poor employment opportunities, and the effects of maternal education on teen birth were positively associated with teen birth” (Penman-Aguilar, Carter, Snead, & Kourtis, 2013, p. 6). This research and Moynihan’s report connected African-American families to low income and low education, and race was blamed for the pregnancies by assuming that an unstable, poor economic family structure caused it.

Lewis’ (1966) and Wilson’s (1989) theories centered on African-American families and their poor social and economic conditions. Lewis’ (1966) Culture of Poverty Theory was defined as a “culture of people who have a certain way of life that has been passed down from generation to generation, and their lifestyle is already set based on the family structure and dynamic of the culture” (p. 3). He related African-American families to impoverished conditions and limited resources because of the slaves who were brought to the United States; during that time, men were separated from their families and the women became the sole providers for their children,



generally with inadequate resources to care for their children. Based on the Culture of Poverty Theory relative to African-American families, the absence of a father and the presence of single mothers have been considered a foundation for this culture and nothing more should be expected.

Wilson's (1989) Theory of Social Isolation focused on a "race of people who lacked resources and employment in their communities and the school system was insufficient, which caused minimal social control" (McLanahan, & Garfinkel, p. 99). Wilson focused on African-American single mothers in urban neighborhoods. According to his theory, limited resources and single parent families isolate African-American families from other parts of society, and this produces criminal activity; likewise, the lack of resources and employment force African-American single mothers to rely on welfare which further isolates them from other people in society.

### **Income**

Poverty is defined as "a family whose total income is less than the family threshold determined by the government" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015, p. 2); the average poverty rate for most single mothers is based on the number of children in the household. The current threshold for a mother with one child is \$16,000, and increases \$3,000 for each additional child included to the family; African-American families are disproportionally represented as being impoverished, According to Feeding America (2016), African-Americans had the highest unemployment rate, food insecurity, and poverty than other races:

In 2014, African-Americans were more than twice as likely to be unemployed (11%) as their white, non-Hispanic counterparts (5%). One in four (26%) African American households are food insecure as compared with one in 10 (11%) of Caucasian households and one in seven (14%) households overall. Median income for African American households (\$35,398) is significantly lower than their non-Hispanic White counterparts (\$60,256). Poverty rates for African Americans (26%) in 2014 were more than twice that

of non-Hispanic whites (10%). Twelve percent of African Americans live in deep poverty (less than 50 percent of the federal poverty threshold), compared to seven percent of all people in the United States. (p. 1-2)

Because African-American families having the highest percentage of poverty and low income, they depend on government assistance for financial support, and government programs assist them with income funding and employment. However, the government only concentrates on putting people on welfares to work instead of them advancing their education.

The welfare system has been around over 80 years, and various reforms have been implemented to minimize the poverty rate in the United States. The welfare assistance program began during the Great Depression when President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act of 1935, and this law “created three programs: the old-age retirement program that is often simply called Social Security, the Unemployment Insurance system, and the Aid to Dependent Children program, or the ADC program and currently known as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or AFDC” (Moffitt, 2015, p. 730). Initially, the Social Security and the Unemployment Insurance systems were for working families who earned a certain amount of income, but the two programs primary focus was to provide for poor elderly and unemployed families:

In 2007, expenditures in the Social Security retirement program were \$485 billion and were \$30 billion in the Unemployment Insurance program, and this compared to, for example, \$12 billion in the cash portion of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which is the current name for the former AFDC program (Moffitt, 2015, p. 731).

The Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program was created as aid for poor families; the funding also was granted to White women with children who either lost their husbands or whose husband was in the household and disabled, because of the idea of women working outside of the home was not acceptable; African-American families’ resources from the government were thus

further limited. In 1956, Congress revised the ADC program into the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program; its purpose was to only “cover the severely disabled to reduce the probability that recipients would be capable of employment; nonetheless, the money from the program was still assisting people in poverty, for it paid \$99 billion in 2007” (Moffitt, 2015, p. 731).

President Johnson created government programs to reduce poverty, place people in the workforce, and improve their education. Following were some of the programs developed:

the Peace Corps, Job Corps, VISTA, Head Start, Community Action, Upward Bound, Legal Services, and the Office of Economic Opportunity and the War on Poverty, but President Johnson ended his support on the push during the Vietnam War” (Lipman & Davis, 2014, p. 314-315).

In addition to these programs, President Johnson initiated the Food Stamp program that provided food vouchers to needy families, and Medicaid that was the medical assistance program granted to poor families; other programs launched concentrated on women and children, as well as impoverished families:

The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program was created in 1975 and provided food and nutrition assistance to pregnant women and to infants. Finally, in 1975 Congress passed the Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC, which gave families who worked a tax credit on their federal income taxes, the credit amount in proportion to their amount of earnings. (Moffitt, 2015, p. 732).

The welfare program was not reformed until 1996, when President Bill Clinton established the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). With this act, welfare was replaced by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, and the criteria of which was:

Cash welfare would be based on reciprocity instead of solely on need, meaning that adults had to work or prepare for work to qualify for cash welfare. No parent could receive more than five years of welfare checks using federal funds, although there was no limit on other benefits such as SNAP and Medicaid. TANF block grant gave states a fixed sum of money, and this funding approach gave states more financial incentive to

reduce the rolls. States were required to have half the adults on welfare in work activities for a minimum of 30 hours per week, with “work” defined in the statute. States were required to construct and enforce a sanction policy that reduced or eliminated the cash benefit if adults did not meet the work requirements. (Haskins, 2015, p. 2)

The PRWORA and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grants only focused on work instead of educational advancement, and forced women on welfare to choose between employment and education. Because of needed income to care for their families, single mothers chose the workforce and placed education in the back of their minds. These specifics to the law prohibited the thought of pursuing education:

Job-skills training, education directly related to employment, secondary school, equivalency classes, and other specified activities can count toward a recipient’s required work activity hours only if those efforts are combined with at least 20 hours per week of participation in subsidized or unsubsidized employment or community service (the requirement is 30 hours per week for two-parent families). Vocational education training is the only educational activity that need not be combined with paid work in order to be counted toward the work-hours requirement. It may be counted toward the work requirement for only 12 months in a recipient’s lifetime. (Jeounghee, 2012, p. 73).

Once this law went into effect, college enrollment began to decline. According to Cerven (2013), “20 percent of welfare participants withdrew from universities because of the work-first state policies” (p. 4-5).

### **Wealth Gap**

Wealth is defined as “net worth: the sum of assets, less debts, and it insures against negative income shocks, access desirable neighborhoods and schools for children, and hold social and political power” (Killewald, 2013, p. 1177). Wealth is needed to achieve the American dream, which is sufficient income and financial security. Most African-Americans have difficulty accumulating wealth because of racial disparities, and those discrepancies involve unequal income and wealth assets. In 2011, the “median White household had \$111,146 in wealth holdings, compared to just \$7,113 for the median African-American household; in

addition, only 45% of African-Americans were homeowners compared to 73% of White homeowners” (Sullivan, Meschede, Dietrich, & Shapiro, 2015, p. 1). With these wealth and asset gaps, African-American families struggle to achieve the American dream of wealth and financial security, and constantly find themselves in a minority and lower class than Whites.

African-Americans endure racial inequalities with wage accumulation, which varies based by gender. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), women earned substantially less than men in salary, for “women had median weekly earnings of \$744 of the \$909 median for men” (p. 1); however, African-American women earned less than White women. The “median weekly earnings for Black men working at full-time jobs were \$704, or 74.8 percent of the median for White men (\$941). The difference was less among women, as Black women's median earnings (\$646) were 85.1 percent of those for White women (\$759) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016, p. 1). Occupational segregation is the reason for the discrepancy. African-American women undergo occupational segregation because of race and gender. The earnings of African-American women and Whites indicate a separation between the races and places Whites as more valuable in the workforce than African-American women. Additionally, African-American women are disadvantaged from earning enough income to financially support their children.

### **Paternal Support**

Many African-American women are single mothers because of the absence of the father, and the reason for the absence began during “deprivation and historical slavery in the United States” (Krämer, 2016, p. 226). During slavery, African-American families were sold and separated from their families, and the women in the family transitioned into the role of being the primary caregiver to their children. Father absence in African-American families continued with the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program in the 1950s by passing the *man in the*

*house law* or the substitute father law; this regulation barred men from residing in the house with women who received government assistance. Moreover, social workers were given permission to “remove a woman and her children from the welfare rolls if she allowed a man to live with her and her children (Lefkovitz, 2011, p. 597). Because of the enactment of *man in the house law*, more African-American families disbanded, and the fathers were labeled as *deadbeat dads*, which is defined as “non-residential fathers, especially African-Americans, who denied paternity or shirked their paternal obligations,” (Denny, Tiayon, Lykke, & Milkie, 2014, p. 224),

Absent fathers continue to be an issue due to criminal activity and incarceration/ African-American men have been disproportionally represented in the criminal justice system, for “4,347 African-American men per 100,000 are inmates compared to White men being 678 inmates per 100,000” (Pew Research Center, 2013, p. 31). Due to the number of African-American men being incarcerated, more women head African-American families and more children are left without a male role model in their lives. During incarceration, African-American fathers have trouble establishing and keeping a relationship with their children because of the restraints of being an inmate, and they are unable to provide any financial support. Because of the lack of emotional and mental support from fathers who are incarcerated, African-American children may make negative decisions that could affect their adulthood, such as “experiencing sexual intercourse early, poor mate choice, and relationship instability” (Graber, Gesselman, Crosier, & Schember, 2014, p. 274). They may experience mental and developmental delays, as well as a repetitious cycle of father absence and single motherhood when they become parents.

Although increased numbers of African-American fathers are absent, not all African-American fathers are absent from their children’s lives. The number of African-American fathers present and active in their children’s lives is higher than any other race:

70% of African-American fathers are actively involved with children under the age of five years old compared to Whites at 60%, and between the ages of 5-18, 57% of African-American fathers are actively involved with their adolescent children compared to their White counterparts at 54%.” (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2013, p.5-7)

Since African-American fathers are actively involved in their children’s lives more than other races, they recognize the importance of a strong relationship between father and child. They also identify the positive outcome of children whose fathers are present, such as higher self-esteem, greater self-confidence, and increased self-efficacy. When fathers are consistently present, the “fathering role is more likely to follow a normative trajectory of development that father and child construct, and children therefore may experience a greater sense of external organization, contributing to more optimal internal organization” (Bocknek, Fitzgerald, Schiffman, & Vogel, 2014, p. 316).

### **Childcare**

Single mothers struggle with finding adequate childcare for their children when they attend college campus events and classes, and often they have to choose between their education and proper childcare. “42 percent of single student parents say it is likely or very likely they would have to withdraw from school due to their dependent care responsibilities” (Schumacher, 2013, p. 3). As the sole caretakers of their children, and no dependable or reliable assistance monitoring their children while they further their education, the only choice some single mothers have is withdrawing from their studies until they can establish a stable childcare system.

“Most colleges do not offer accessible or affordable campus daycare, after school programs on campus or baby-sitting services” (Mahaffey, Hungerford, & Sill, 2015, p.107), and many single mothers have to find other means for childcare; often those means are limited. One reason colleges and universities do not offer the option of childcare is budget cuts. Additionally,

some administrations believe that “parenthood as an irksome baggage that poor people come with” (Carlson, 2015, p. 1-2). Administration at some colleges and universities believe that childcare is the single mothers’ responsibility, and they rather remove themselves from situation instead of helping them succeed in their postsecondary studies; moreover, they automatically stereotype single motherhood as being a problem amongst poor people when single parenthood affects all races and social classes.

### **Financial Assistance**

Financial aid is defined as government assistance used to help students pay for their education, and although single mothers receive financial aid to cover college expenses, there is a limitation to what they are rewarded. The cost of colleges and universities ranges from “\$7,000 at community colleges to \$11,000 at universities; however, students only get \$4,000 of aid at community colleges and \$10,000 at 4 year institutions” (Juszkiewicz, 2014, p. 5). Because of the insufficient financial aid funding given by the colleges and universities, single mothers suffer from an unmet need, “a gap between the total cost of attendance and total aid available to the student, including grants, loans, and expected family contribution” (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2012, p. 16), and they have to find other means to pay the difference they owe to the college or university before they attend and take classes. Student loans and extended hours at work are some ways single mothers attempt to pay for the unmet need, but those actions are still not enough to cover it, because the gap could range from “\$7,000 to \$10,000 per year” (Kenefick, 2015, p. 2). Working long hours to pay for these expenses minimizes time spent completing coursework assignments and caring for their children. Single mothers are, again, faced with the decision of choosing between education and the workforce.



## **Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are defined as “traits that mark a well-known type, and these traits create a mental picture in people’s heads about a culture or race” (Lippmann, 1946, p. 33), and perceived stereotypes from society can negatively affect African-American single mothers’ motivation to complete postsecondary education. The Jezebel a stereotype originated from slavery and was placed on African-American women by Europeans. The women were identified as “savage and primitive, which justified the idea that they could not control their sexuality and needed Whites to control their promiscuity” (Davis & Brown, 2013, p. 113). During slavery, African-American women were not considered human beings; rather they were seen as animals and were treated as such. African-American slave women endured and control by beatings, free labor, and rapes by their White masters.

Because of the stereotypes of African-American women during slavery and the fact that the unplanned pregnancy rate of African-American women is higher than any other race, society continues to view them as jezebels who are oversexualized and sexually irresponsible, categorizing them as “sex objects, baby mamas, mistresses, and whores” (Heath, 2014, p. 47). Media outlets exploit these false characteristics of them through film and they are subjected to more demeaning treatment than White women because of the images of them that began during slavery. African-American women are treated with “sexual violence, discrimination, and sexism” (Perry, Harp, & Oser, 2013, p. 4) in the media. Stereotypes and labels of matriarch and welfare queens were created as labels for African-American single mothers.

The matriarch stereotype was developed in the 1960s and suggested that the role reversal of African-American women being dependent of their husbands to being the head of their households stemmed from “slave families being separated on the auction block which caused a

matrifocal, or mother-centered, pattern in their family structure” (Moynihan, 1965, p. 11-12); likewise, the report specified that more African-American families in urban areas were headed by women, and they were dependent on the government’s welfare system because of the broken family structure that followed them from slavery. Due to this report, President Ronald Reagan birthed the term welfare queen during a speech in 1976, when he stated that African-American single mothers were “lazy Black single mothers living lawlessly in the ghetto” (Lansberry, Taylor, & Seale, 2016, p. 5); furthermore, he supported this perception of African-American single mothers as welfare queens by telling the story of Linda Taylor, an African-American woman who was convicted of welfare fraud. Because Reagan connected welfare queen to an African-American single mother’s face, people believed his stance and adopted the label African-American single mothers as welfare queens.

### **Marginalization**

Marginalization is when a particular group or culture is placed in an “outsider within status and is excluded by white society” (Collins, 1986, p. S14), and African-American women have experienced marginalization within their employment due to the mammy stereotype of “hard domestic work for low wages” (Collins, 2000, p. 46). During slavery, African-American women subjected to domestic work, but the work they did for their masters was free labor, and after the abolition of slavery, they were still worked in domestic positions earning little wages. African-American families are still often marginalized by White society for not following the traditional family model of former Vice President Daniel Quale; he asserted that a normal traditional family structure was “father-headed, earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-home

wife and mother, and children” (Collins, 2000, p. 47). African-American families were the opposite, with mothers being head of household, working outside of the home, and earning a living to care for their family.

African-American mothers have been marginalized because of the matriarch, or strong black woman, stereotype. According to Collins (2000), both White and Black societies view African-American mothers as “devoted, self-sacrificial, and unconditional loving women who can endure any amount of pain and turmoil” (p. 174), and they are more respected based on the amount that they struggle; moreover, because of the reverence they receive from Blacks and Whites based on their poverty and struggles, African-American mothers remain silent about their heartache of keeping that strong black woman persona and appeasing their culture for racial solidarity.

Because of marginalization of the mammy and matriarch stereotypes, African-American single mothers experience racism and discrimination on campus, and they are “hated, rendered invisible, put under increased surveillance, or assigned into one or more socially acceptable stereotypical categories, such as lazy, unintelligent, violent, hypersexual, preference for welfare, and uninterested in working for a living” (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2007, p. 563). Due to these thoughts about their inadequacies and performance from White society, African-American single mothers’ self-efficacy is affected and have doubts regarding achieving their postsecondary education.

### **Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality is a theory that focuses on the “intersecting patterns of racism and sexism within a particular culture or group” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1243), but it has expanded to focus on religion, social class, and sexual orientation. Because of stereotypes society has created

about African-American women, they are judged because they are women and women of color. The combination of gender and race discrimination puts these women in subordinate positions where they lack dominance and superiority. This control keeps them at bay, makes them feel inferior and is evident in “racially discriminatory employment and housing practices, as well as the disproportionately high unemployment rate among their race” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1243). To control and regulate African-American women’s economic advancement, White society hires them in domestic labor positions at minimum pay, which causes them to live at low-income or poverty level, and ensures that African-American women do not earn close to the amount of wages they earn by paying them “60 cents for every dollar paid to White, non-Hispanic men” (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2015, p. 1); moreover, since African-American women earn substantially less than Whites, they are restricted to a housing market that concentrates on separating them from majority White communities.

African-American women experience difficulty with career advancement because of gender and race discrimination, and white society keeps them in subordinate positions. Companies operated by Whites may overlook African-American women who are qualified for high-paying positions for “men only promotion because they do not take women seriously” (LaPan, Hodge, Peroff, & Henderson, 2013, p. 7). Because of the *good ol’boy* mentality of advancing the careers of White men over women, African-American women are subjected to positions for which they are overqualified, and often are prevented from moving up the corporate ladder and reaching what is known as the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling may make African-American women feel isolated and unsupported by their peers and not considered as competent to hold powerful corporate positions.

African-American women experience race and gender discrimination as students at colleges and universities because of stereotypes and marginalization, and although they are invited to partake in campus life, they are treated as “outsiders with little to no voice” (Bartman, 2015, p. 4). They may be frowned upon and judged for being visible on campuses and may have trouble establishing social capital with others, lack faculty and peer support, and become stressed from the isolation. They may eventually withdraw from their postsecondary education.

African-American single mothers experience gender, race, and parental discrimination because of the middle-class, European-American, heterosexual standards of motherhood. These normative standards hold that “good mothers will personally, financially, and emotionally devote themselves and center their lives around their children” (Ceballo, Graham, & Hart, 2015, p. 498), a belief that goes against good mothering within the African-American community. Most African-American single mothers think that good parenting requires support from extended families and communities who assist with raising the child; nevertheless, because of their ideas being different from the societal norms, they are labeled as unfit mothers who are not adequate to rear a child or children. Due to their views on good parenting, African-American women are categorized as “lazy and incompetent welfare queens, as mothers who produce crack babies, and as emasculating Black matriarchs” (Ceballo, Graham, & Hart, 2015, p. 498). Because of these negative labels of African-American single mothers, they suffer from the decision of pursuing a postsecondary education, because they must choose between being a good mother or a good student. Regarding doctoral and faculty positions, additional barriers hinder their advancement as balancing family and representing their race and gender respectively become problems. African-American women experience “instances of sexism at their institutions of employment when faced with family-related matters such as maternity leave, which negatively affects their attitudes

toward their own success” (Charleston et al., 2014, p. 277), and they endure racial discrimination with their employment when attempting to improve the underrepresentation of minorities by recruiting and promotion.

### **Impact of Gender and Racial Discrimination on African-American Women**

Gender and racial discrimination have detrimental effects on the lives of African-American women and single mothers, and prolonged stress from being marginalized and oppressed by White society are produced because they began to feel “hopeless, dependent, demoralized, degraded, and defeated” (Pierce, 1977, p. 11). The physical and emotional stress that occurs with gender and race discrimination causes African-American women and single mothers to believe the microaggressions, or the offensive racial remarks, told to them by White society because of the negative words and statements verbalized to them; furthermore, the stress escalates to physical health ailments, such as “diabetes, hypertension, and lupus” (Watkins et al., 2014, p. 563). Coping strategies have surfaced that African-American women use to manage the stressors of gender and racial discrimination. Those strategies are “relying on prayer and spirituality, drawing on strength from ancestors, maintaining a positive self-image, relying on social support, altering outward appearance and presentation, avoiding contact with certain situations and people, and directly challenging the situation” (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2012, p. 56).

### **Institutional Supports for Single Mothers**

Single mothers need support from faculty and staff on college and university campuses to complete their postsecondary education and to provide economic stability for their children. Colleges and universities have identified issues that cause single mothers to either prolong their studies or withdraw from their postsecondary education; likewise, programs have been

implemented to aid single mothers by “offering special academic programs, implementing early-warning systems to recognize struggling students, setting up full-service satellite campuses, making themselves available on public transportation routes, and finally welcoming adult students in orientation programs” (Held, 2015, p. 3). These academic programs have granted easier access to the colleges and universities, and single mothers see that they care about them earning their postsecondary education.

Colleges and universities use social media as peer mentoring and academic tools to communicate with students. Using because social media websites, such as Facebook and Instagram, “assist with students connecting with others of the same cultural and social background and help to maintain existing relationships” (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013, p. 6). Social media is a powerful tool for peer support, and there is a strong connection between online social support and academics. Most professors and instructors use social media in the classroom for collaboration and team development; additionally, they have used it to “assign small group work, assign points for pertinent comments in online discussions, and offer feedback” (Kitsantas, Dabbagh, Chirinos, & Fake, 2016, p. 228).

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, factors that could deter single mothers from obtaining their postsecondary education and advancing their careers were presented and explained; moreover, various strategies used by colleges and universities to support these mothers with persisting and earning their degree were introduced and elaborated. Chapter three focuses on the research design and methodology of the study. It provides details differentiating between qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research and the research paradigms; additionally, it explains the analysis used to complete the study and the process of interpreting the data.

### **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Scholarly and educational research allows researchers to comprehend the educational issues that occur within a particular race, class, or gender; scholars use the results from various studies to suggest solutions to problems pertaining to that group. Scholarly research is an “application of the scientific method by using standardized set of techniques for building scientific knowledge to an issue” (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 5), and the purpose of educational research is to “describe, understand, and explain how learning takes place throughout a person’s life and how formal and informal contexts of education affect all forms of learning” (American Educational Research Association, 2016, p. 1). Within education research, three research methods, or research paradigms, are used to conduct studies. A research paradigm is “a loose collection of logically held together assumptions, concepts, and propositions that orientates thinking and research” (Bogdan & Biklan, 1982, p. 30). The three research paradigms are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

Education researchers use various methods with the scientific method, and vary in their reasons why they follow a particular research paradigm. Quantitative research, “hard numerical data, generated through empirical research that was subjected to a battery of statistical tests” (Bailey, 2014, p. 177), is used by researchers who believe that validity and reliability of research solely involves statistical data and analysis; in contrast, qualitative researchers in education focus on the *what* and *why* questions to know people on a more “subconscious level, and they use prolonged discussion and analysis to understand and interpret the data” (Barnham, 2015, p. 839). Education researchers who use qualitative research believe that this paradigm concentrates on knowing people on a deeper level and identifying their thoughts about substantial topics. They think this research paradigm can “outdo quantitative research by asking better *what* questions to



reach a better understanding of these mental facts” (Barnham, 2015, p. 839). Education researchers who apply the mixed method research approach believe in the importance of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms and intertwine them to understand people statistically as well as subconsciously.

Research paradigms identified as inquiry define for “inquirers what it is they are about and what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Inquiry paradigms center on the following assumptions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Guba & Lincoln (1994) defined the assumptions as the following:

Ontology is referred as the form and the nature of reality, while epistemology is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known; furthermore, methodology is the methods the inquirer would use in order to find out whatever he or she believes can be known. (p. 108)

Axiology and rhetoric assumptions were included later. Axiology focuses on the “ethical theory and practice in research” (Mertens, 2007, p. 215), and rhetoric is an assumption that is concerned with the “choice of language used in the reporting of the research” (Johnstone, 2004, p. 261).

### **Research Designs**

The three research designs used in scholarly research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative research is an “interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world that allows qualitative researchers to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3); moreover, it answers *what*, *how*, or *why* questions and uses words instead of numerical data to get a profound understanding of the phenomena and the people affected by it. Qualitative research stresses the importance of observing the activities of people and daily events and identifies themes and commonalities from the events; additionally, the “range and frequency of actions and meaning perspectives that are observed, as well as their occurrence, are narratively

presented” (Erickson, 2012, p. 1451). Narrative data is collected through different methods and is based on the research questions and theory the researcher used. The collection is through either “in-depth interviews, analysis of textual or visual content, participant observation, or focus groups” (Howson, 2010, p. 3). After the data is collected, it is analyzed for patterns of words and phrases and coded into similar themes. The interpretation process occurs after the themes are identified.

Quantitative research is used to “test hypotheses, determine causation between variables, and measure the frequency of observations” (Hoe & Hoare, 2012, p. 55). This research method uses numerical or statistical data to explain phenomena. Quantitative research uses statistical data to present the results objectively through various instruments, which include surveys and scaling. Data collected and analyzed through the instruments could appear as either “raw figures and percentages and secondly, more visually, as line graphs, tables or histograms” (Broomfield, 2014, p. 35). The data is used to form interpretations about the phenomena and the interpretations shows either relationships between the variables or issues that need further research.

Mixed methods research is the combination of qualitative and quantitative data in a study. This mixing of the research designs “produces a fuller account of the research problem” (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015, p. 3) by analyzing and interpreting multiple worldviews within a single study to understand a phenomena. For mixed methods research, the qualitative and quantitative research designs must run concurrently and be based on the research questions. Some researchers value mixed methods research because of the sequential process of the analysis, and they believe that this research approach has the “ability to provide stronger inferences than a single method or worldview; furthermore, it provides an opportunity for a

greater assortment of divergent and/or complementary views” (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013, p. 25) that would either require additional investigation of the assumptions or a holistic view of the phenomena. Mixed methods research utilizes themes from observations and statistical data to draw attention to the phenomena and provide suggestions for additional research based on the two combined analyses.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences African-American single mothers encountered while furthering their education for career advancement. The research questions were:

1. What are African-American women’s experiences being a single mother?
2. What were some supports received being an African-American single mother?
3. What was African-American single mothers’ motivation to persist in college and earn their degree?

Personal accounts of African-American single mothers’ experiences were vital in this study and gave a deeper meaning to the research; likewise, qualitative research was the research method used to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences and their supports while college students. Within the qualitative study, narrative research and analysis allowed the participants to express their lives from their perspective, which assisted in understanding their accounts on a deeper level.

### **Narrative Analysis**

Narrative research “focuses on people’s authentic stories and the way individuals give meaning to experiences via their stories” (Korpi, Peltokallio, & Piirainen, 2014, p. 220). The researcher used his approach in this study to address the research questions; furthermore, such research gave personal insight into the experiences of African-American single mothers while they pursued education for career advancement, and also the supports they had available and

those that were provided while they sought their higher educational goals. Narrative research concentrated on personal life stories, and others who have not had the same experiences can understand the encounters on a more profound level.

Narrative studies take an analytical approach to data, and three different understandings exist with this approach. Robert & Shenhav (2014) stated that narrative analysis referred to a “paradigm in itself in some research; second, in others, narrative analysis means a specific axiological option; and finally, for the majority, narrative analysis refers to a set of analytical strategies” (p. 8). Narrative analysis as a paradigm within itself refers to taking the interpretive approach to the research, and it “adopted a set of specific ontological and epistemological assumptions, such as subjectivism, and an attention to processes of co-construction of reality” (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 8). For this study to have richness and importance related to the research questions, the reality of the participants was needed and this was documented by allowing them to document themselves and their life experiences. For the women in the study to discuss the details of their lives to a stranger showed a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participants, a necessity to collecting authentic and substantial data for analysis.

Narrative used as an axiological choice allowed the participants to tell their stories and be heard, and gave them power within the study. The participants felt powerful because their experiences were requisite for completion of the research, and the researcher listened attentively to them to ensure validity. Although the researcher was considered the expert, that title was transferred to the participants because of their experience with the phenomena.

After the data collection, narrative analytical strategies were utilized, and those strategies were produced from literary and linguistic properties. The elements used in the narrative analysis

were “events, characters, setting, point of view, and interpretations of personal stories, and they act9ed) as an analytic grid used to condense and analyze the empirical material qualified as narratives” (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 9). In this study, the African-American single mothers were the characters in the narrative and their descriptions of the events that occurred while single parents and college students provided a mental picture of how their encounters happened. The participants’ personal perspective of their events assisted the researcher in finding word patterns and forming interpretations based on their encounters.

### **Population Sampling Technique**

Sampling is defined as the “selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives” (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015, p. 1776). This study used purposeful sampling, which involved people who followed particular traits or qualities related to the purpose of the research. Purposeful sampling explained why these characteristics were significant. Furthermore, purposeful sampling is described as:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry...Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding. (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015, p. 1776).

The criteria for the use of purposeful sampling in this study was the following:

1. African-American woman
2. One or more dependent(s)
3. Single parent
4. Obtained a Postsecondary Education
5. Head of household
6. Birthed child during adolescence

After creating the requirements for the study, criterion and snowball sampling were used to search for African-American women who exemplified the standards. Snowball sampling helped with “identifying cases of interest from sampling people who know people that generally

have similar characteristics who, in turn know people, also with similar characteristics” (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2013, p. 535). The research was announcement on various Facebook social groups as a networking strategy to find the participants for the study and women who lived in the Baton Rouge, Louisiana area contacted the researcher based on the Facebook description of the research. After the potential participants made contact, more detailed information about the purpose and reasons for the study were explained. When the women agreed to partake in the study, they received a consent form (Appendix A) and a participant information form (Appendix B) as part of the research process. Interviews did not commence until the forms were completed, signed, and received from the participants. When the required forms were received, a date and time were set for the interview. Three of the interviews were face-to-face, and five of the interviews were video and audio recorded, because the participants resided in different states.

Before the interview began, an interview protocol (Appendix C) was read to the participants, and they were informed about the research and the reasons for conducting it; they were told that their names would remain anonymous and pseudonyms would be used as an identification tactic. Personal information, such as names of families and children, was not used during the study.

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour; after the interviews were completed, the researcher inquired about other African-American single mothers with similar experiences, and the participants provided information about women who potentially fit the study. A total of eight African-American single mothers contributed to the research.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Prior to data collection, the researcher completed and submitted a form to the Louisiana State University's Institutional Review Board for approval to conduct the study (Appendix D). Qualitative interviewing helps researchers "gain insight into lived experiences, learn the perspectives of individuals participating in a study, and discover the nuances in stories (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 1). Additionally, it gives a deeper understanding of the social issue. The interview approach of this study was semi-structured, so the researcher could ask emerging questions based on the responses of the participants. This technique allowed the interviewer to act as a "discreet facilitator whose role was to provide the conditions for the participant to speak of her experience in an uninterrupted manner" (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 10). This also allowed the researcher an open opportunity to ask follow-up questions not be associated with the pre-constructed questions used during the interview process.

The study used an etic and emic approach, Lacasa, Borda, & Mendez (2013) defined etic and emic approach:

Etic approaches create descriptive categories that are used by analysts to sift through patterns in linguistic data, whether or not those categories correspond to differences perceived as meaningful by users of the language being analyzed, emic approaches seek to capture differences that language users themselves orient to as meaningful (p. 136).

The etic approach discovered similar patterns the African-American single mothers shared based on the experiences they shared, and the emic approach of the study found distinctive, meaningful elements among the participants.

The dialogue between the researcher and the participants allowed the participants to explain their experiences being single mothers and college students. The questions (Appendix D) guided the discussion and helped the researcher with detecting barriers, supports, and motivation during their persistence in college, and it gave a clear understanding of the experience single

mothers faced as non-traditional students pursuing advanced degrees. The qualitative research framework helped illustrate the experience from each participants' point of view of how certain events led her to endure and persist in college.

Multiple data source gathering techniques were used in this study. The researcher used the one-on-one interviews as the initial data source to produce the narrative about each participant's experience while attending college. In addition, the researcher gathered personal information from the participant information form (Appendix B) detailing their level of education and age when they birthed their first child.

### **Individual Interviews**

The interview guide used in the study gave the researcher particular topic to address and discuss during the interview segment. This revealed patterns or themes from the participants' perspective about the experiences that motivated them to persist in college. The interview questions (Appendix D) were unknown to the participants before the interview; the interview protocol list of questions was the initial guide used during the interview process.

The researcher informed the participants that the interview would last for 30-45 minutes in length, but some lasted over an hour. The questions were answered based on the single mother's perspective, and other questions were asked based on the responses given. The interaction during the face-to face interviews was audio recorded, and participants who lived in different states were audio and video recorded. The researcher conducted follow-up interactions with the participants to ensure the transcriptions were correct and for further questioning.

### **Data Analysis**

Narrative analysis was used to conduct the study so the researcher could have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of single mothers' experiences while furthering their



education. It was also used to explore the struggles they endured and the internal and external supports that inspired them to persist and complete their advanced degrees. Data collected through the audio and audio/video interviews were transcribed by the researcher and utilized for data analysis. After the transcriptions were completed, the participants were emailed their transcriptions for review to ensure accuracy. If there were any issues with the transcriptions, changes were made to the participants' satisfaction.

After the approval of the transcribed interviews, constant patterns of words or statements from the participants the data in the data were analyzed and highlighted. After highlighting the patterns of words and phrases, a Microsoft Word document was created with categories that were common among the women. The categories were:

1. Support
2. Stereotypes
3. Motivation
4. Difficulties Being a Single Mother and College Student

After coding the data, it was examined for emergent themes, and as the emerging themes were identified, the original transcriptions from the interviews were reviewed to ensure accuracy of the themes.

### **Subjectivity**

The researcher had previous knowledge of the concerns plaguing African-American single mothers and the barriers they faced as an only parent. The researcher became interested in single mothers while a schoolteacher in 2011 at a Jackson, Mississippi public middle school in a low-income area. The researcher worked with sixth and eighth grade students whose heads of household were mostly women. The demographics of the middle school were mostly African-American.

While at this public middle school, some of the female students were pregnant. The researcher was concerned about how this would affect their lives and the lives of the single mothers who would have to take care of them. Furthermore, the question surfaced of whether they would further their education.

In 2014, the researcher moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and began teaching at a public magnet middle school. Most of the researcher's students were African-American, and they resided in various areas around the East Baton Rouge parish. Most of the parents stressed that they were single mothers caring for their children without any assistance from the fathers of the children. Some worked multiple jobs while some attended a local college, worked full-time, and cared for their children.

In addition to these situations, the researcher had personal interactions with African-American women who were single parents and attending a college or institution. A friend of the researcher was a single parent with two children. She attended Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi, as a part-time student, and she worked a full-time job as a case manager for the Department of Human Services. She was working on her Master's in Social Work to become a certified social worker for her job. Because of her success in balancing school, work, and single motherhood, the researcher was interested in the source of her persistence and the supports that assisted her along the way.

The researcher was interested in this topic because of the negative societal perceptions about single mothers. Listening to and understanding about single mothers' lives through this study may shift the viewpoint of those who have not experienced this situation, and it could motivate women in a similar situation to go to college and obtain their degree. This research could be a blueprint of what is needed to persist and succeed with a college education.

### **Realities of the Research**

This study involved African-American single mothers who furthered their education and obtained postsecondary degrees for career advancement. The realities of the study were as follows:

1. Only African-American single mothers were interviewed. Research based on other races, genders, and social class may give a broader perspective on the research topic.
2. Only eight participants were used for the study. More participants could give a broader overview of single mothers' experiences in college.

## **CHAPTER 4 RESULTS**

This chapter presents the results from the study based on the findings from the interviews and the participant information form completed by the individuals; in addition, it analyzes the data and gives interpretations based on the themes and patterns identified within the interviews. This data provides insight into the experiences eight African-American single mothers between the age of 26-59 who persisted through life as single parents and college students; furthermore, the nationwide study concentrated on African-American single mothers from various backgrounds and different generations to provide a substantial richness to the research, and show that their experiences are quite similar although their ages varied. The semi-structured interviews provided several themes and subthemes, and those were:

1. “Life after the unexpected”: barriers and difficulties faced while pursuing their postsecondary education and bettering the lives of their children
2. “We all need somebody to lean on”: external support that produced internal motivation
3. “I’m not who you say I am”: stereotypes, marginalization, and racial microaggressions
4. “Motivation is key”: external motivation that internally motivated them to succeed in life
5. “You’re a survivor”: motivational words for other single mothers

### **Theme 1: Life After the Unexpected**

#### **Barriers and Difficulties Faced While Pursuing Their Postsecondary Education and Bettering the Lives of Their Children**

The first major theme that surfaced was the barriers and difficulties the participants faced while pursuing their postsecondary education. All of the participants shared similar experiences of childcare being a mental and emotional strain on their lives. Most of the participants talked about the lack of money they earned while working and taking care of their children, as well as transportation issues that hindered them from going to school and childcare for their children.

Finding people to watch their children and care for them while at school and work were problems the participants endured and they exhausted all resources available. The themes and sub-themes for this section answer research question number one: *What are African-American women's experiences being a single mother?* This theme was encompassed by the following sub-themes: *No money more problems, I'm on an emotional rollercoaster, This is new to me, and He's out of my life.*

#### No Money More Problems

Lack of money was a constant concern the participants expressed that was a major problem with caring for the needs of their children. The income from working full and part time jobs still did not suffice for their children's necessities. All of the participants utilized government assistance; however, some explained how the government assistance was reduced or eliminated due to the amount of income accumulated within their household. Participants talked about transportation as a challenge, because they had trouble getting to college and other places for their children, and they had to rely on public transportation until they could afford to buy their own vehicle. Additionally, some had issues with reliable childcare while attending work and college and had to take their children to work and class. Although they encountered barriers that could have discouraged them from persevering, the participants understood the importance of life advancement with a college education, and their personal educational goals internally motivated them to push through the struggles and continue working towards their postsecondary education. Diane explained the extreme difficulty of being a single mother without resources:

It is always a challenge. You are always just thinking about the next thing. You are working. You have to make sure your child has a suitable home. Their needs are met. My family wasn't financially secure to be able to help me. My mom did what she could. My grandmother did what she could, but I had to work. I had to always ensure my son had safe child care at that age and early on. You get whatever assistance is out there for you, but anyone who has had the experience even though you graduate from college and you

make a little bit of a minimum wage, and when you don't qualify for anything, you still have to, most of your paycheck is gone anyway.

Tammy's transportation issues, financial difficulties, being a single mother, and finding reliable childcare while working and attending school caused a physical strain on her. Although she had family available, they were unwilling to assist her with anything pertaining to childcare, which caused more financial stress because Tammy had to pay for a babysitter.

In college I just needed a sitter so I could get to class, and sometimes I had to ... I mean, as soon as I could get to class I needed transportation, so I could get her ... I was doing the bus at first ... Bus to the job, and a baby sitter and a bus back to a job, I mean back to a sitter, and then back home, was a bit much. Leaving home on the bus, going to the sitter on the bus, you are going to the sitter on the bus and then you going to work from the sitter's house on the bus, then back to the sitter's house on the bus, and then back from the sitter's back home. I mean, that's a lot, you up early, you all day on the bus. So, you have to make a decision between work or school, or somehow get a job at school, so you could make one stop. Then you have to get a sitter that's close by. You started just trying to solve all these ridiculous problems when you had people around you, you know, family members that live in the area, because I was out of parent's home by then, family members that lived in the area that were available wouldn't help you.

From a low-income family that was struggling financially, Betty understood that her pregnancy at a young age placed an additional burden to her family. She wanted to ensure she and her son did not go through the same financial strain that she saw her parents endure, and she knew that obtaining her college education would give her the necessary income to care for her child.

I even, you know, it was like it put a hardship on the family because my parents, my mom and my step-dad, they didn't have very much and it kind of put a hardship on the family. I guess that due to the fact that this had happened it made me more motivated to want to further my education. I was just motivated by wanting to do better and to be able to take care of myself and my child because I saw it was putting a hardship on my mom.

#### I'm on an Emotional Rollercoaster

All of the participants suffered from emotional and mental strain as teenage mothers and adjusting to the life of a single parent. Some of the participants experienced depression and

mental anguish because of their decision to have unprotected sex and bear a child at a young age, and the despair still haunted them. A few of the participants had to deal with other life issues in addition to caring for their child, which caused mental turmoil; however, they surpassed the emotional and mental anguish they felt, because they understood that their lives did not center around their mishaps and worries, and their lives were bigger than their own personal problems. Because of their desire for their child's success and avoiding their struggle in life, the participants temporarily suppressed their emotions and fought through them to create a better life for their children.

While a single mother, Jessica divorced twice, cared for her child with special needs, and attended college; there were times that the responsibilities of life caused her to withdraw from college a few times; nevertheless, those life challenges did not stop her from achieving her educational goals.

My second husband ended up being a drug addict. Even though I had attempted to try to go back a couple times when I was married to him, there was just no way that I could because your mind is always somewhere else. My last child was diagnosed with autism and ADHD, so there was always a constant going back and forth with the school, finding him the right program. Different things that really would take your concentration and focus off of school.

Lisa had to mature quickly as a young single mother, because she was in foster care. Since she was pregnant while in foster care, she had to complete emancipation papers to be removed from the government system; otherwise, she ran the risk of her child being taken away and placed in adoption services. Although this experience was overwhelming, she took responsibility for her actions and she did what she had to do to care for her child and attend college:

I was actually a foster child at that time. I had been in foster care since I was 11 years old, I believe. When my son was born, I actually submitted emancipation papers for me to be able to get out of foster care and live on my own because if my child was born while I

was in foster care, they would've took him from me also. I worked full time. Many times, I actually took my son to work with me. A lot of times, at work or in my college classes, after I graduated, my son would be right there with me.

During her pregnancy and after childbirth, Kathy realized that life did not revolve her anymore, and her sole responsibility was to care for her child. Working a part-time job and attending high school and college were stressful mentally and emotionally, but she knew that she could not depend on others to raise her daughter. Kathy matured while pregnant and after childbirth, and she placed her children as top priority of her life:

It was an overwhelming experience because to go from just caring for you, I was working, you know, a Burger King job. Being responsible for another person. It's like a drastic change for an adult, let alone somebody who's still in high school. I was working a job, making minimum wage, 3 children- how do you do that? I'm like, "No." Then it's always been me and my mom. I'm an only child. You know, so I'm like, "Okay, listen. I work in a job that frustrates me. You're not paying me enough for me to be stressing." I resigned from my job one week and then the next week, I was in class. It's my children, my job, and my school. You know, they are taken care of. I work because I got to pay the bills. Then school so I can get a better job.

This is New to Me

Transitioning from being an adolescent girl to a young teenage mother is an adjustment, especially if the young woman had no parental training before childbirth; most of the study participants had no parental life skills before childbirth. They learned how to be a parent by real-life practice either with the assistance of family and friends assistance or on their own; furthermore, being free to participate in extracurricular activities in high school and college was null and void. There was only time for parenting, school, and work.

Samantha sacrificed being on the dance team and having a social life to care for her daughter, because she only had time to be a parent and a student. After the birth of her daughter, her routine was school, work, and parenting, and her family ensured that this strict routine was enforced:



But, it was a challenge because I had to adjust to something. I knew nothing about being a parent and I'm the youngest child of 3 and I'm the last grandchild on both sides. My parents' side, so I hadn't been around a lot of babies. I didn't have any younger cousins so adjusting to being in high school, my life was different because I had to get off the dance team, because I couldn't go to practice in the afternoon because I had to go home to my baby. Boy, we had a very strict life, a very structured life, because I had to take care of my child. It was my child, then my academics, so I had no social life. I never asked of my support system to babysit for me to go anywhere else but school. My life was school and taking care of my daughter and going to church. We had a routine, so our lives were very strict. I didn't go out much as a college kid. I didn't do lot of things that college students did because my life was going to school and then going back home.

Beth's social life always involved her daughter, and it still does. She did not abuse her family's support for leisure and pleasure, although they allowed her to have a little social life; she only used them when it pertained to school and work. She knew that her daughter was her responsibility, and she did not mind stepping up to the life adjustment:

The social aspect of it did change you know, I was not always at every football game, or I was not going always with friends. I went to school, picked up my kid, or I went to work, and we hung out on the weekend. Even still 10 years later, she is attached to me every weekend. Then I took her to some of the games as well, people knew. There is Britney, there is her daughter. Even still now at 26, some people do not take their kids to Southern games, or football games period. No, she goes. I just have to make sure my cell phone is completely charged. She does not say anything, she does not whine, she does not complain. It is a beautiful thing, it is amazing. People know, when you see me, 75% chance you going to see my child with me. I make sure the people that I keep around me respect that ... nothing comes before my child, ever. I want to say that I keep a pretty good group of people around me that understand that she comes first. What you want to do is cool, but I got to make sure I got a babysitter, and if they say no, it looks like we in the house.

### He's Out of My Life

None of the participants had involvement from the paternal parent for various reasons. One common reason was illegal activity; other fathers left the mothers while pregnant because of other relationships. Since they did not have the financial and emotional support from the fathers, the participants relied on men in their family and the community to be positive role models in their children's lives; one participant had trouble finding a male figure as a role model. The

negative encounter the participants had with some of the fathers of their children continued to affect most of the men because most of them had no experience with a stable male relationship.

Kathy implied that her child's father might have been involved in criminal activity, because his life was unsafe and unstable for a child, and he was not allowed to be alone with her daughter. She was uncomfortable talking about his involvement with his child, and she hesitated explaining the details of his unstable life; however, she seemed to avoid bashing him:

Her dad and I were together until she was 2. Her dad, okay. Financially every now and again, he gave money. I mean, I don't want to ... Yeah. He gave money every now and again. The babysitting, I would not. The lifestyle he led then, even now, I wouldn't have trusted him to babysit her. It was too much going on. When she went to her grandparents' house, she was there with them. He would see her because she was there. I mean, he spent time with her because she was there, but she wasn't in his care.

In addition, Beth shared similar experiences with Kathy; she was hesitant about speaking of the life between her and her child's father because of his criminal activity. Her child's father went to jail because Beth was underage when they had sex, and he had been in and out of jail since that event. She was traumatized by the experience because she was skeptical of her daughter and her child's father meeting for the first time, and she was doing everything in her power to avoid that meeting.

You will not hear me say anything about him. I was 15 at the time I got pregnant, he was older than what he said he was, so it was statutory rape basically. He is not around. He has never been around. I guess I am to the point in my - I guess she is to the point in her life where she has asked me about him more than once, so I now have to ... as much as I, I guess you could say I am scared and kind of apprehensive about the whole process of finding him. As far as finding him and introducing them, I do not know how he is going to take to her, I don't know specifically how she is going to take to him. It is scary, it is very scary for me. When we had the conversation about her father the last time, I told her that he was in and out of jail, and I did not want to expose her to that. She hit me, oh, she broke my heart. She said - because I tried to explain to her, I am trying to make it seem like "You know, it is okay." "You know because some of your cousins do not have, you know their fathers were bad, and you know they do not care for them." Her rebuttal: "But at least they have the experience."

Diane was another participant related to the father being uninvolved because of the criminal justice system, and her very brief mentioning of him showed that she did not want to go into detail about his past: “My son's father was not in the picture at all. He was a product of his environment as well. He ended up being incarcerated when my son was six months. He did about 15 years in jail.”

Although most of the participants had fathers who did not exist in their children’s lives, Betty had active involvement with her child’s father, but it was later in the child’s life that the father became financially involved. She, too, tried not to talk negatively about him and ensured that she mentioned him being there from time to time:

We kind of broke up during the pregnancy and he ended up going to the military and he didn't, I would talk to him from time, but he didn't provide much financial assistance at all during that time. He did not help with the child during that, for about ten years.

All of the participants had male family and friends upon whom they depended to be male figures in their children’s lives except Diane, who struggled to find that male figure for her son; moreover, her relationships with men have been difficult, and her experience being a single parent was so emotionally traumatic that she sought counseling to emotionally and mentally cope with being a single mother:

My son is in college now. I haven't been in a position where my son has even had the male figure in his life. That's a challenge within itself. Just this week, dealing with everything that's happened with the police and the Black males out there and all that happening, that's a struggle because I have a son out there who is black in America. That's my struggle I have to deal with as well. I go to counselling because I had to understand because even though you make that decision at 16, that dysfunction follows you through your adulthood. I've never been married. I've hardly had any healthy relationships with men. I had to get to the point where you have to figure out how to stop emotionally abusing yourself.

## Conclusion

The participants in the study suffered difficulties as young single mothers, and some still harbor the pain from the events that occurred while pregnant teenagers and raising a child at a young age. Financial and emotional stressors, unexpected life happenings, and abandonment from their child's father were barriers the participants faced, but these impediments did not deter them from earning a college degree and bettering the lives of their children. Although the participants were internally motivated to achieve their educational goals for the sake of their children, all of them had external support that helped them along the way.

The next theme discussed is *We All Need Someone to Lean On*, and it focuses on the following research question: *What were some supports received being an African-American single mother?* The sub-themes are: *We are family*, *It takes a village to raise a child*, and *My school is awesome*.

### **Theme 2: We All Need Somebody to Lean On**

#### External Support that Produced Internal Motivation

All of the participants had external support for their children that allowed them to persist and to earn their postsecondary degree. Those supports continued to help them through their life-altering journey of being a single parent. Most of the participants had childcare assistance from immediate and extended families, and some had babysitting help from close friends and their families. Other women in the study had financial assistance, as well as childcare; additionally, they had support from the faculty and staff of the high schools and colleges they attended. Without the external support they received, the participants were unsure how they would have made it through life as single parents. This theme is followed by sub-themes that answer research question number two: *What were some supports received being an African-American single*

*mother?*; the sub-themes are: *We are family*, *It takes a village to raise a child*, and *My school is awesome*.

## We Are Family

Most of the participants received financial and/or physical aid from immediate and extended family members for the care of their children; nonetheless, the financial support varied based on the their family members' income. The participants were grateful for the help they received with caring for their children, and they did not take their assistance lightly; likewise, they still were the sole contributors and providers for their children, and they did not misuse the help they received. Because of their immediate and extended families' willingness to help, the participants were internally motivated to continue life as single parents and college students.

Three participants, Kathy, Samantha, and Beth, elaborated on the amount of help with their children they received from family members, and they still receive the same amount of support today. From their children's doctor's appointments to extracurricular activities that the participants could not attend due to school and work obligations, they never had to worry about who would be there for their children. Beth came from a middle-class family who had the means to financially and emotionally support her, and because of their availability, she never had to worry about anything in regards to her daughter:

I had a really good support system, my parents, my aunt - I had a live-in aunt - and my brothers, they all helped. My parents are great providers, so it was nothing that I ever needed, she ever needed, nothing. Doctor's appointments ... Anything and everything, it was all taken care of always. It was never a question whether I was going to have it, or whether she was going to have it, it was always "Okay, just tell me what you need", or even what she wants because if she bats her eyes, she will have it. Even still, ten years later.

Samantha, also, came from a middle-class family who gave her whatever she needed to care for her child, necessities that ranged from childcare to monetary support. Although Samantha was the primary provider for her daughter, she did not have to stress about resources because her family was the secondary resource:

So, it was a challenge, but I lived at home with my parents so my parents helped me a lot. My mom actually retired the year after I graduated from high school to help me with my baby. Weekends when I was in college, my parents helped me a lot. When I lived at home they would help me and take care of her while I studied, but I never took advantage of that. When I transferred to Southern, my grandfather was still alive. He lived here and he helped me a lot. My grandfather was retired and they would take off and come if she was sick and take care of her for me to go to class. My aunt, my mom had a sister who lived here, she helped me a lot. They live in Southern Heights, so I could drop her off to them if I had to come back to the school in the evening time. I had a 2 bedroom, 2 bath apartment that my parents helped me to get, and I was able to get ... Somebody told me about a program called Section 8 for housing. It took me a year, but I got on that. They helped pay my rent and then my parents paid the difference. Parents made sure I had a working car.

Although some participants had family who could have provided financial and physical support systems, some participants did not have that luxury. Diane came from an unstable low-income family that could only give her physical and emotional support, not financial security. Because of the financial insecurity of her family, Diane worked to support her son. Once her mother had the ability to financially assist, she did, but she did not seem to want to give her mother credit for the financial assistance she did provide. Her response about her mother financially supporting her indicated that there was tension between Diane and her mother:

My family wasn't financially secure to be able to help me. My mom did what she could. My grandmother did what she could, but I had to work. I had to always ensure my son had safe child care at that age and early on. I mean most of their support was definitely the emotional support. My family didn't have any financial security, so it was mostly the emotional support. When I had my son being at high school, I'd drop him to my grandmother in the morning. She was a babysitter. I didn't have to face the childcare for my oldest. My mom, she was able to put him on her insurance. Gave us some more freedom with the doctors that we could use at the time. My mother wasn't in a position to take care of me financially. I mean the support as I got older and went through college, my mother was able to put herself in a better position, so she always made sure I had a

vehicle and she paid my car loan, but otherwise it was just myself for everything else. My sister was in Baton Rouge at the time, so I definitely had a good support system.

### It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

All of the participants had external support from close friends and community members with raising their children, and the women in the study recognized that, by their selfless acts, not only did their family and community want them to succeed, but also they wanted them to achieve their educational goals to advance the lives of their children. Some of the participants received help with resources from friends and fellow classmates, and others accepted assistance from faculty and staff who networked to get them jobs and childcare. Betty came from a low-income family that could not afford to financially support her son, and she needed a job to earn income for necessities. The superintendent from her high school district networked with surrounding areas to find her a job; furthermore, one of her female classmates advised her on what steps to take to graduate on time from high school:

I didn't have a whole lot of ... I don't recall speaking a lot to the counselor at the time but the superintendent, he lived in the neighborhood and he helped me get a summer job you know, he helped me. He knew my family, as a matter of fact, we lived in the same neighborhood and he helped me get a summer job and you know I did have assistance like that. The faculty, they were nice, I had good experiences. They helped where, if I needed any assistance they would help me as needed but I don't recall any negative things. I had a good relationship with them if I needed something they would be able to listen to me. After the birth of my child, I did get assistance from another teen parent. She was instrumental in helping me get information to take correspondence courses needed to complete my high school education. This young lady finished high school and received a bachelor's degree as well.

Lisa received childcare support from one of her instructors in her college class, for he allowed her to bring her son to class when she did not have anyone to monitor him at home. Moreover, the family of the child's father contributed to caring for her son by offering them a home in which to reside. Although the family of the child's father accepted the fact of the

teenage pregnancy, they were not fond of Lisa because of her family background and her being in foster care:

I actually, at 17, my son's father, his parents bought a house in the suburbs and they allowed me to rent their old house. They weren't really particular about me. Because I did have my son, they tried to support me in ways such as that they did watch him sometimes, but they were very kind of like vindictive. They were supportive because they were supportive of my son, but they more so tolerated me than really supported and respected me. When I did take him into class ... I started in the social work field and I ended up transferring to special education. My instructors and my professors were very understanding. I actually had an instructor that, you know, I would bring my son to class, and he was very good. He was keeping quiet. I always kept him busy. I guess in one of the class, my classmate said something. That particular instructor actually started bringing his baby to class. It was really neat that that's message he had. He had a six month old. He started bringing the six month old to class. It kind of softened everybody.

Tammy had to rely on friends to provide childcare for her daughter when she had to either go to school or to work; however, their assistance was unreliable, which resulted in her getting a full time job and other odd jobs to pay for babysitting services:

I had to get any and every assistance they gave me. I worked. I did whatever I could; if I could mow a lawn, I did whatever I could. Anything that I could do...I asked friends. I would ask them for money, and I would try to babysit for other people so they would babysit for me. Sometimes they would, sometimes they would say they were busy when it came time to babysit for me. Sometimes they would, I ended up finding a friend that would babysit for me when I would babysit for her.

### My School is Awesome

Two of the participants in the study had help from the high schools and colleges they attended in regards to parenting and job skills; likewise, some of the high schools and colleges offered daycare services to the participants, which made it easier for them to attend high school and college classes. When Jessica became pregnant, she attended a high school with a program for pregnant and parenting teenage girls, and they gave her training skills on the daily activities she would have to complete as a parent; in addition, they provided counseling services and



created an action plan on how to complete high school. This school was a positive influence on Jessica's life because of the interest the faculty and staff had in her and her child:

Community High was basically a high school for people to do something that was non-traditional then the other two main high schools. They also had a program there for teenage mothers. We had a nutritionist that came in every week. They had people that came in every week to help teach parenting skills. We had visits from medical personnel, so while I was in that program after I had my daughter, even though at the time, it was nice and I didn't realize what a great thing that it was. It was really phenomenal for us teenage mothers to have a shared group of people that really took an interest in us. The teachers took a special interest in us and they worked with us through different things.

As Jessica transitioned from high school to college, she still had external support from faculty and staff, because the college she attended had daycare services for single parents. Based on her response, it was evident that she was grateful for the additional assistance the college gave her in regards to childcare assistance because she did not have to find people to watch her child while at school and could focus on her studies: "But at that college, they did have daycare so I was able to bring them to the campus for daycare at the same time."

Lisa continued to receive services from the foster care program after emancipation, as the program prepared her for work and independent living; furthermore, her high school and church offered daycare services for single parents, so she did not have to worry about childcare services from friends and family while attending high school:

I worked full time. Many times, I actually took my son to work with me. I had a very supportive boss. I worked for the Flint Public Library through a transitional program for older foster kids. This transitional program actually kind of helped us with independent living skills, things like that. I got a job through this transitional program. We had a daycare actually in our school, because I'm from Flint, Michigan, and so it was a very urban district during that time. There were many other girls, my age also, that were getting pregnant during that time. We actually had a daycare in the school. I had a daycare at my church. Between the daycare at the school and the daycare at my church, that's how I kind of finished high school with my son.

## Conclusion

The participants in the study received external support from family, friends, and other people in the community, which helped them with achieving their educational goals in life. The women had people who were willing to assist with their children because they, too, believed that earning a postsecondary education would generate advancement in the workforce and provide more financial stability for single parent households. The people who were selfless with their support knew the women would persist and excel in their postsecondary studies, and because of the participants' self-motivation, people in their community wanted to see them prosper.

The next theme discussed is *I'm not who you say I am*; this theme is a continuance from research question number one: *What are African-American women's experiences being a single mother?* The sub-themes from this theme are the following: *Jezebel is not my middle name* and *Ain't no clone here*.

### **Theme 3: I'm Not Who You Say I Am!**

#### **Stereotypes, Marginalization, and Racial Microaggressions**

Their fellow classmates and the faculty and staff of their high school scrutinized the study participants, and they experienced verbal insults as well as negative innuendos about their sexuality. Furthermore, some people from the community placed labels on the participants because of being young single mothers; nevertheless, the participants used the stereotypical, marginalized comments as motivation to prove the doubters wrong about the outcomes of their lives and the lives of their children. The sub-themes in this section are the following: *Jezebel is not my middle name* and *Ain't No Clone Here*.

## Jezebel is Not My Middle Name

Some of the study participants were ostracized and labeled as sexual deviants because they were teenage mother, and the people who criticized them never took the time to understand what made them decide to have sex at a young age and become pregnant. Instead of trying to help the women in the study during this trying time, some people in their lives ridiculed and passed judgement against them and tried to ruin their reputations. Instead of accepting people's judgmental opinions about their lives, the participants kept those comments in the back of their minds and utilized them to motivate themselves to graduate from college and have financial stability.

Some of the participants were subjected to the labels *whore* and *loose* as pregnant teens, and some of the comments insinuated that the women had multiple partners and had no idea who their child's father was. Beth received negative comments from her classmates that suggested that she was promiscuous and blamed her for repetitious pregnancies occurring within the high school. Although the statements said about her from her classmates offended Beth, she did not allow their remarks to negatively affect her schooling, and she did not seem bothered about the events:

Yeah, one of the white ones, she was just like "Who would have thought" ... She was just like "Oh, you started something by having a kid," because then a couple other of my classmates popped up pregnant sparingly throughout the years after that. I was just like "Okay," side eye. Other than that, it was only my black classmates that gave me any issues, or had anything stupid or negative say. It was guys. It was me, another girl, and 2 guys. It was 3 guys. One of them said, "Oh, the baby is for the other friend," then another one turned around and said "Oh, the baby is for the other friend." Both of you are idiots and I would not ever, but then it sparked off this big rumor thing. "Oh, Beth's baby is for da da da da. Oh, Beth's baby is for him da da da da" ... Whatever.

Tammy endured the same fate of being categorized as an overly sexual young woman who had multiple sex partners and several sexual interactions. She was offended by the

comments made to her as a young single parent and still despised people's thoughts about her and other young single mothers:

Being ostracized and labelled as a quote-unquote a fast girl, or something like that, because you got pregnant. When really, I didn't know what I was doing and I don't know, I just felt very alone. I only had, really, one genuine friend whose mom did not mind, so she knew me and she knew what kind of person I was and she knew that I wasn't not how I was being perceived. She knew me and she knew that I had my daughter hanging around me, and that was the one friend that I had. I decided that people just ostracize you, they just have their own ideas about why you're a teen mom. Even now, they're like, "you were getting around early, weren't you?" They didn't realize that I had sex one time and got pregnant, they don't know those details. They don't know that you didn't even know what you were doing and no one discussed sex with you, that you didn't even know what sex was. You get people ostracizing you and you don't know why. You just feel like, oh, I must be a horrible person for letting this happen to me. You just, sort of, have this developmental protected measure to try and protect yourself as much as you can, shield yourself from criticism.

Samantha experienced criticism from her school and community about her teenage pregnancy and young motherhood, and judgment passed on her trickled down to her family. People in her community shunned Ms. SD and her family, and her family was devastated by the treatment. The negative attitude from people in her community and the effect the pregnancy had on her family's polished reputation made Samantha feel guilty about the ordeal:

You know, being pregnant in the high school I attended, my father was the principal of that high school but not at the time I was there if that makes sense. People that you thought were your friend weren't your friends. Parents sometimes didn't want their kids to befriend me. I was talked a lot by a lot of children, a lot of young men that I thought were friends, that I thought were cute and stuff, they didn't look at me at the same. People would say I was fast. People were ugly to my parents. My parents had friends that they thought were their friends and there were people in the community because my parents were both educators, they knew a lot of people ... They had people to talk about them, and it hurt my mother a lot. She lost friends behind that because she said she was going to support her daughter with a baby. People talked about us at the Catholic Church. Even when it was time to christen my baby, people would act like "Is she going to christen that baby? That baby was born out of sin." Yeah, so people were mean. People in the church were mean, some of them. Some of the teachers were mean. They were ugly to my brothers. Even though I had a brother that was in college who had finished from the same high school, and people told him things to tell him that his sister was fast. People called

me a h-o-e which was very inaccurate because that was the only boy I had ever been with and I had only had sex 2 times. It kind of made it difficult that people would be like that.

### Ain't No Clone Here

Some of the participants were compared to other women in their community or other stereotypes, and the women felt beneath other people who were not in the same predicament as them. The people in the participants' communities thought that the young mothers' lives had reached a dead-end, and that they would be another statistic. Lisa faced judgement from the family of her child's father simply because she was a foster child. His family thought that she was worthless, and they made her feel that way from the time she was pregnant, and continue to make her feel that way. Lisa was blamed for the mishaps that occurred in the life of her child's father, even his death:

They always told my son's dad that I was just going to be this girl that didn't have anything going for herself. I wasn't going to be anything. I wasn't good enough for their family. Even when I was going to school, they said to me, "You have this baby now. Why don't you just go to school to do hair and nails just like all the other ghetto girls?" I said, "No. That's my plan." When I got my undergrad, they still treated me very condescending. It then turned to, "Well you got a bachelor's degree, but you're still not better than us." Once I got my bachelor's degree, they started feeding things into him, like I think I'm better than him. They always made him feel like he had to compete with me. It was almost like, "You let this girl that come from nothing do better than you. You need to do this. You need to do that." To the point where he felt like he wasn't good enough, to the point where five years ago, he committed suicide. Unfortunately, out of that situation, I'm blamed for that. Even though I am about to complete a doctoral degree, it's still not good enough for them. They tell people I got lucky. I manipulate people.

The community in which Diane resided thought her life was over when they found out that she was a pregnant teen, and they considered her as a failure in her child. The community stereotyped her as a low-income welfare queen who would never succeed in life, and that made her circumstance difficult at times:

I'll say in high school, it was pretty tough because you had these people that looked at you, adults, teachers. You know that look at when you get pregnant, they figure she has no future. What is she gonna do? If we want to talk about people being judgmental that

happened more in high school than it did in college for me. I had my life, if you looked at my life, I was definitely the one that probably still should be in Opelousas where I was born and raised, in a project with a whole bunch of kids. That's what my future looked like for a lot of people.

## Conclusion

The people in the community had harsh words for the participants in the study, and many made them feel less of women because of their choices of having sex and becoming pregnant at a young age. Some people in the communities belittled and demeaned the women, trying to break their spirits and kill any aspirations they had for their lives; however, the women were warriors through the marginalization and stereotyping, and they showed the naysayers that with ambition and drive, nothing could or would get in the way of their dreams and goals in life.

The next theme is *Motivation is key*, and it is related to question number three: *What was African-American single mothers' motivation to persist in college and earn their degree?* The sub-themes are: *Children uplift me*, *Family equals success*, and *Community is my unity*.

### **Theme 4: Motivation is Key**

#### External Motivation that Internally Motivated Them to Succeed in Life

The participants in the study received external support from family members, close friends, and people in the community who believed in them and wanted them to succeed in life; their assistance helped the women in persisting through their postsecondary education. Although those external supports heightened the participants' internal motivation, other factors increased their internal motivation to continue reaching their education goals for career advancement. This theme answers research question number 3: *What was African-American single mothers' motivation to persist in college and earn their degree?* The sub-themes are the following: *Children uplift me*, *Family equals motivation*, and *Community is my unity*.

#### Children Uplift Me

Some of the study participants were motivated by the children they birthed and raised at a young age, and their desired outcomes for their children inspired them to complete their postsecondary education. They recognized that sex and pregnancy at a young age were mistakes, but they did not want their children to suffer because of their choices. The participants wanted to be examples for their children and wanted to internally motivate their children by their actions, so they showed them that no matter the circumstance or situation, they could succeed.

Jessica endured situations that could have prevented her from completing her postsecondary education and advancing her career, but her children believed in her and pushed her to continue with her education. Because of her children's assistance with childcare and other necessities for their younger siblings, Jessica was able to complete her postsecondary education:

When I finally decided to go back years later, and by that time, there was two children, who I had as teenagers, I gotten married again and had another son, and then that marriage ended, they were really the catalyst. Those two are really catalysts for me to pick up going to college again. They said that they would babysit for their little brother. They would take turns and that it was something that I instilled in them. I was pushing them to go to school. They said, "You need to go back and finish yourself." They were the catalyst for me to finish going back.

Lisa was also motivated by her children, because she wanted a better life for them than she had; moreover, she did not want her family to repeat her family cycle. She understood that a postsecondary education would give her the financial stability, and she was willing to sacrifice for the sake of her children:

My children and I did not want to end up like my mother. I don't want my children to ... I knew that I wouldn't have been able to afford my kids anything if I didn't have the education, if I didn't have the career. My kids were my complete motivation. That was definitely part of it. I can honestly say that was definitely part of it. The thing that motivated me to keep going was the fact that I had this little kid when I was 17 years old. I grew up and I came from a family that really had no motivation to better themselves in life. When I had this baby, my motivation was breaking the cycle. I had this baby and I looked at him when he was born and I was just like he didn't ask to be here. It's not fair that I make this child grow up in a life of poverty because of a decision that I made. He

was really my motivation to kind of get myself together, to go to school, to become something.

Diane wanted to become a role model for her children and she knew that education would improve their lives and provide them what she lacked as a child. Diane did not want her children to experience the negative situations she experienced as a child, and she worked hard to ensure that did not happen:

My children and I did not want to end up like my mother. I don't want my children to ... I knew that I wouldn't have been able to afford my kids anything if I didn't have the education, if I didn't have the career. My kids were my complete motivation. My life was not about me at all. I'd say my life probably wasn't about me up until maybe couple of years ago. I did nothing for me. Everything I did was for my children. My children was my motivation. It didn't matter what I had to do. I did it. My motivation was my kids, because I don't want them to build the struggles that I had to deal with. My kids wasn't exposed to half, to any of the stuff that I was exposed to as a child or as far as family life. My kids they don't even know the struggles that I really dealt with financially, emotionally. My kids were my motivation for me to do everything that I've done, because that was the only way I can get from one point to the next.

#### Family Equals Motivation

The positive and negative events that occurred with the participants and their families amplified their determination to obtain their postsecondary degree and better their lives emotionally and financially. Some of the participants reflected on the lifestyles of their families that impacted their lives, positively and negatively, and motivated them to earn their college degree and be successful. Beth's parents were role models to her, and they encouraged her to seek the same lifestyle for her and her daughter: "Just looking at my parent's building their house from the ground up, not needing for anything. That is a motivating factor for me."

Kathy thanked her mother for being the solid foundation in her life and for motivating her to go back to college; additionally, she appreciated the support and encouragement her mother provided. Without the selfless acts of her mother, Kathy was unsure of the outcome of her life and the lives of her children:



Me and my mom sat down, she was like, "Do you really want to go to school?" I said, "I think I'm ready this time." She said, "Well, take this semester. Go to school and see if this is really what you ready for." My first semester of school, I did not work. I resigned from my job one week and then the next week, I was in class. She was the motivator. I started back working in December but that first semester, she took the load to make sure I was ready. Then I got through that first semester, and I started back working, and was able to finish. I did my 4 years. My mom, she was the one, my number one supporter that pushed me.

Some of the participants had pleasant reflections about who their motivators were and why they were motivators; however, some of the participants' motivation stemmed from negative encounters with family and the community, and they used those situations to motivate them to succeed and live a life that was better than their former situation. Betty constantly remembered the hardship put on the family because of her teenage pregnancy, and that thought bothered her in adulthood. Her repetition of the word "hardship" indicated that her family ingrained in her mind that her decisions caused strain in her upbringing. The low-income background and her family history encouraged her to become educated and advance in her career:

I guess that due to the fact that this had happened it made me more motivated to want to further my education. Then I had younger siblings at the time, three younger siblings as well. I was just motivated by wanting to do better and to be able to take care of myself and my child because I saw it was putting a hardship on my mom. She wasn't educated you know and she didn't have a good job and I had a step-father and he had issues with drinking and it was just putting a hardship on the family because I raised some dysfunction there in the family.

Constant reminders of the additional burden Tammy placed on the family and the lack of assistance from her family motivated her to go to college and earn her degree. Likewise, the ridicule from her community and the stereotypical labels placed on her because of her pregnancy urged her to graduate from a university and establish a better life for her and her daughter:

I just saw that nobody would help. I just kept going and said, "I'm going to have to make a better life for my daughter, I don't want her to have to go through this." Just making a better life was the motivator, so I would not be struggling like that and my daughter

would not be struggling like that. I quickly had to come to a resolve that it was me against the world and whoever was willing to help they can get on board and the rest of them can go to hell, boom. That's how I would put it. I didn't care who it was, I didn't care if it was family, if it was friends, you know? The experience of the push back from the community, the coldness in the community really was a motivator for me. That was a motivator. I was just like, "this is crazy." No, I was just saying the push ... The ostracizing that I got from the community that was a motivator too. That was a motivator, because some people told me I couldn't do it, so many people told me that I needed to get out of school. I heard that on a consistent basis that I need to get my priorities straight, that I had a daughter to take care of and you in school all the time, and at work.

## Conclusion

External motivators helped the study participants pursue graduate studies, and those motivators, whether negative or positive, assisted them with creating a life where their children did not have to suffer or experience the things they did as children. Parents who were positive role models in their lives were sources of encouragement and their actions sparked a desire to be like them in the future. Some of the participants' determination came from doubters and people who either had no goals or aspirations in life, or felt empowered by belittling the participants. Instead of believing the harsh words said to them, the participants used the negativity to motivate them and to prove people wrong about them being another statistic.

The final theme in this study is *You're a survivor*, and the sub-themes are *Let me help you* and *You're gonna make it*.

### **Theme 5: You're a Survivor**

#### Motivational Words for Single Mothers

All of the participants acknowledged that the support they had from family, friends and community gave them the determination to pursue through their graduate studies and to earn a postsecondary degree. Since those determinants molded the women in the study into focused-driven, career-oriented individuals, they wanted to repeat the cycle of external motivation by

offering encouraging words to other African-American single mothers who struggled with being a single parent and a college student; furthermore, the participants could motivate others to pursue their educational goals and have careers that stabilized them financially and emotionally. This theme is an addition from research question number 3, *What was African-American single mothers' motivation to persist in college and earn their degree?*, and the sub-themes are *Let me help you* and *You're gonna make it*.

#### Let Me Help You

Some of the participants have lent a helping hand to young single mothers they have met and have offered resources to them so they could enroll in college and complete their postsecondary education. The women in the study have transitioned from young single mothers to positive role models in their community and were willing to be that external support for those who may lack such assistance. Samantha is a prime example of passing the torch of external motivation to a young single mother because not only did she give the young woman advice on achieving her educational aspirations, she offered her services if needed:

I always encourage them. I tell them about my story. It's not something I broadcast, but it's something if they seem down, I'm happy to share and tell them, if you're going through a struggle, that struggle is not going to last always. Continue to push. Teach your children about your situation but be a good example. Pray through it and go to school, because there are people on these college campuses that want to help you. The first person you meet might not be somebody that wants to help you, but there's somebody at that institution that's willing to help you. If there's not anybody at that institution that's willing to help you or on that job, call me. I have to set the standards high so I can be helpful to others that ... You know, and pave the way for others to come that haven't. I don't advocate for teen pregnancy, but once I meet people that are teen mothers or are pregnant, I try to let them know, look at me. If you don't see anybody else on billboards that talk about they were a teen mother, you can look at me and know that I was a teen mother and I made it.

Lisa offered her assistance to every single mother she met, especially ones who were from the foster care system, and she becomes that supporter for the ones who may not have an external support to motivate them with succeeding in their educational goals:

The advice that I would give is don't quit. You really have to be proactive. You really have to be your own advocate. You really have to speak out and search for the resources you need to be successful. I tell them my story and I'm like, "Look. You can do this." I try to be a support system. I always tell them, "Don't allow anybody to tell you can't." That's advice that I give them. Do not allow anyone to tell you that you can't do it. Don't allow anyone to do that, because you internalize that and you start believing that. Then you start acting accordingly.

Tammy gave advice to young single mothers who lacked resources and assistance such as she faced, and she specified these resources because she had stressful encounters where she did not have those vital supports. Tammy was willing to help anyone because people were unwilling to help her, so she wanted to "pay it forward" and provide the young mothers with skills and necessities for single parenting and college success:

Number one, to get a stable place to stay and your own transportation. Work on that. Use your money from school to help you get that. I would ask them to get a counselor. That's why I would recommend a counselor. I would recommend a counselor from the onset, from the very moment that they become pregnant, I would recommend them to be with a guidance counselor on an ongoing basis, for mental support and for guidance. That's going to interconnect them to community resources.

### You're Gonna Make It

Some of the participants had words of wisdom to give to young single mothers who experience the same difficulties they endured or believe that they are another statistic. Kathy used her life story as encouragement for others so they could understand that determination can lead to success in any challenging situation:

Trust me, baby, if I could do it with 3, you with 1, it's nothing. It's nothing, and I was working. It's doable. You can do it, you just have to be in your mind. You have to be ready and you have to be ready to put in the work. It's not easy but you can do it." My mom, she was the 1, my number 1 supporter that pushed me. Now I'm in grad school. Working, grad school, and you got 3. I got a daughter about to start college. Really? Are

you serious right now? I'm in school and she in school. She graduated in May, I graduate next May. I'm like, "Hmm. Again, if you can do it. It's not easy but it's doable. If you work for it, you can do it." You know, you just have to be ready and willing to put in the work, to sacrifice.

Diane provided advice that could help them emotionally, because she suffered mental and emotional since her teenage pregnancy. She sought counseling to cope with being a single mother and wanted other young single mothers to focus on the positives and not dwell on the negatives they saw or heard; moreover, she advised the young single mothers to get an education and better life for their children solely:

You can't let those decisions dictate what your future will be. You just can't. You have to keep it moving. If you don't keep it moving for yourself, you got to do it for your children because they didn't ask to be here. You made the decision to bring them here and you are responsible for them. Even if the fathers are not around, another one of my kid's fathers was not around but there was nothing I could do about it. I could cry about it all day long, but that's not going to change nothing. They are still not gonna be here to support. They are still not going to be here to help me do anything. All that stuff you have to kind of put it on the back burner. You have to make a determination on what matters. Your children matter. That would be my message. You can't change and you can deal with what you don't have control over, but you do have control over to make better decisions and correct your mistakes.

Jessica used the difficulties in her life and turned them into words of encouragement for other single mothers who share the same experiences, and one piece of advice from her was to not wallow in negativity and despair:

You can do it. It'll get better tomorrow. I did have many days though, you know how life is. Sometimes you have a lot of things happen all at one time. A lot of times I would allow myself to have a pity party for that afternoon. I would go home, close the door, have a pity party for the afternoon and get up refreshed and move on to the next day. Things are not easy. They are going to get difficult but they're not difficult always. What is it the song says? Trouble don't last always? It's worth the hassle. You just got to stick with it. It's not a race.

## Conclusion

The women in the study have become advocates and supports for single mothers, and they continue to support those who need help. One common piece of advice from all of the

participants was, “You can do it.’ The participants did “Do it” and they were models of what success and single parenting look like. The advice from these women is powerful, uplifting, and resourceful, and heeding their advice will advance more successful, career-driven African-American single mothers.

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to detail the experiences faced by African-American single mothers while pursuing their postsecondary education and the external supports that assisted them in obtaining their graduate degree. After analyzing the data, the difficulties experienced as a single mother and college student ranged from childcare to resources. One of the primary issues the women in the study encountered was childcare, because most of them had to either take their children to work or school. Lack of resources was the secondary barrier they endured. The participants agreed that the amount of government assistance was not enough to provide for their children, and the amount of the aid was reduced if an income increased through college stipends or jobs. Furthermore, some had trouble with adequate transportation getting to school and transporting their children. Although childcare and lack of resources were the main barriers they encountered, the participants were motivated to overcome these problems and sacrifice for the betterment of their children.

All of the women in the study suffered from stereotypes and marginalization while working to achieve their career and educational goal. Negative remarks came from people in the community and words were said to attack their self-esteem and lower their beliefs in themselves; in addition, they were accused of being promiscuous and oversexualized. Because of their pregnancies the women in the study lost friends, and these so-called friends judged and ridiculed

them. The negative words said about the participants bothered them, yet they turned those words into motivation to succeed in life and not be or become those labels.

The participants did not have their children's fathers present in their lives, and most said it was because the father was in the criminal justice system. Most of the participants could relate to their child's father being incarcerated, or in and out of the criminal justice system, which caused a gap in establishing a relationship between the child and the father. Because of the lack of the fathers being active in their children's lives, the women in the study relied on the community for support. Although the fathers were not present for their children, the participants continued their education; the lack of the father actually motivated them to ensure that their children had adequate support to make it in life as a child of a single mother.

The women in the study received external supports while furthering their education. Most of the participants acknowledged that their families were there for them, and a range of family members were helpful and supportive during this journey. The participants' mothers were the person who provided the most financial and/or emotional assistance, and they expressed how grateful they were for their mothers being there for them; moreover, the participants repeated how their family members were available when they needed childcare or other help with child rearing. Family members ranged from aunts to cousins, and some of the women in the study recognized their friends as family because of their selfless acts of caring for their children when no one else was able.

The motivation for the participants to persist in postsecondary studies came from various sources, but the primary source was their children; their determination to ensure their children did not have to suffer financially or emotionally caused them to earn their postsecondary education. The women in the study wanted to be role models for their children and wanted to set

good examples for them; additionally, most of them wanted their children's lives to be more financially stable than their lives had been. The participants made sacrifices for their children to have a better life, and some endured backlash and ridicule for the decisions they made regarding their education; however, they pushed through the difficulties because their children depended upon them.

The women in the study gave advice to other African-American single mothers who shared similar experiences but had trouble furthering their education because of the barriers they faced or the negative comments they encountered. One common phrase of advice was "You can do it"; they wanted others to look at their stories and see that a postsecondary education and advancing a career are achievable goals of a single mother, but sacrifices and difficulties happen on this journey. The participants were willing to be external support for women who had similar backgrounds and were single mothers, as they understood the importance of having lifelines for their education and career advancement. The participants repeated the cycle of external support that they experienced. They became more than educated African-American single mothers; they became achievers, motivators, and supporters for all women with a similar life journey.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Eight African-American single mothers were interviewed in this narrative research study that explored the experiences they encountered while pursuing their postsecondary education and the external supports that assisted them while furthering their education. The participants gave birth while teenagers, reared their children as single parents, earned a college degree, and were considered as head of household in their families. This chapter provides an overview of the study, including the methodology, results, discussion, implications, and conclusion; additionally, it detail the participants' experiences being single parents and college students and how external supports helped them with their career and educational advancement.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of the narrative research study was to investigate the experiences of African-American single mothers while they pursued postsecondary education, and discover the external supports that assisted them while furthering their education. Literature details the negatives aspects of being a single parent and college student, but little research has been done on African-American single mothers who persisted through their postsecondary education and earned a college degree for career advancement. Since much negative research overshadows the achievements of African-American single mothers, stereotyping and marginalization occur. Promiscuous, lazy, and incapable are some of the labels placed on African-American single mothers, causing them to be judged by others. Placing these categories on African-American women tends to negate their accomplishments.

#### **Discussion**

Little research is available that details the accomplishments of African-American single mothers while pursuing their postsecondary education; furthermore, more studies focus on the

negatives of this race and gender class, such as being “less feminine, oversexualized, loud and confrontational, unintelligent, and relying on government assistance solely to care for the needs of their children (Babbitt, 2013, p. 792-793); nevertheless, this study wanted to minimize or negate the false ideals created by White society about African-American single mothers and show that all African-American single mothers do not fall under the racial, stereotypical categories that White society attempts to force upon them. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African-American single mothers while furthering their postsecondary education for career advancement and to discover the external supports that caused the motivation to earn their college degree. The research questions that guided the study were: 1. What are African-American women’s experiences being a single mother? 2. What were some supports received being an African-American single mother? 3. What was African-American single mothers’ motivation to persist in college and earn their degree?

Several theoretical frameworks were mentioned throughout this study that correlated with the findings of the research, and the main one was the Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (2001) that included self-efficacy. According to Bandura (2001), self-efficacy causes people to think of themselves in a positive or negative way, and it “plays a central role in the self-regulation of motivation through goal challenges and outcome expectations” (p. 10); moreover, external motivation from family, friends, and community members can heighten the internal motivation within people and help them persist and achieve their desired goals. This theory gave a better understanding of the motivation and persistence the participants in the study had instilled in them and the external factors that inspired them to persist in their postsecondary education.

Another theory described in the study that assisted with understanding the experiences of the African-American single mothers who participated in the research was Pierre Bourdieu’s

Theory of Social Reproduction. Bourdieu's (1986) Theory of Social Reproduction centered around "networking socially with people who share similarities in order to gain access to available resources" (p. 21), and this networking would promote peer support and continue to increase motivation and persistence with obtaining desired goals and aspirations. This theory gave clarity of the social connections the women in the study established with others who had similar circumstances of being a single mother and college student and the assistance they received from these social connections in order to make their lives and the lives of their children better while persisting in their postsecondary education.

In addition to Social Cognitive Theory and Theory of Social Reproduction, intersectionality was an important factor in this study, because it assisted with understanding the multiple identities the African-American single mothers displayed and the experiences they encountered based on the intersecting identities of race, gender, parental status, and student, and it explained the discriminatory experiences they endured because of these intersecting identities. According to Crenshaw (1997), intersectionality is the "intersecting patterns of race and gender, but she expanded it by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color" (p. 248), and it sheds light to the discrimination African-American women face because of the multiple classifications that shape their identities.

Qualitative methodology was utilized to analyze the research questions, and a narrative approach was used for collecting and evaluating the data. Narrative research is "the study of how human beings experience the world through a single phenomenon, and narrative researchers collect these stories and write narratives of experience" (Moen, 2006, p. 56). To understand the experiences of the African-American single mothers, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight women in a nationwide study.

African-American single mothers were selected based on race and gender requirements of the study; other criteria included: has one or more dependents, had always parented as a single parent, completed postsecondary education; head of household; and birthed child during adolescence. Facebook and networking were used for the participant search, and email correspondence was sent to potential participants. Participants were advised in the email of the purpose of the study and interest in their contributing to the research. After the women agreed to partake in the research, a consent form and a participant form were emailed to them with the time and date of the phone interviews. The consent form and the participant form were completed and either mailed or emailed before the interview date and time. At the time of the interview, the purpose of the study was reiterated to the participants, and the participants were offered the option to withdraw from the interview without penalty, as it was a no-risk study; furthermore, participants were informed that the study was confidential and pseudonyms would be used to maintain confidentiality.

The participants were told that the interview would last for at least 30 minutes. Some of the interviews were face-to-face, while others were audio recorded through a Google Voice application. At the end of each interview, the interactions were self-transcribed and coded, and as the interviews were occurred, data-analysis strategies were done for full understanding of the participants' experiences based on the study research questions; the strategies included note-taking, word analysis, and code identification. After completing the strategies, themes and sub-themes were discovered, and interpretations of the data were executed. Lastly, a summary of the findings and discussion of the data were done.

Based on the data analysis of the transcriptions, themes and sub-themes were present, and those were the following: *Life after the unexpected*: barriers and difficulties faced while pursuing

their postsecondary education and bettering the lives of their children; *We all need somebody to lean on*: external support that produced internal motivation; *I'm not who you say I am*: stereotypes, marginalization, and racial microaggressions; *Motivation is key*: external motivation that internally motivated them to succeed in life; and *You're a survivor*: motivational words for other single mothers.

During the interview process, the themes were the initial engagement and sub-themes followed. This study centered on narrative analysis and allowed the interviews to be conversational and provided an outlet for the participants to express themselves fully without interfering with their experiences of being a single mother and college student; since their identities were withheld, they had a sense of security in discussing troubling situations in their lives, as well as the supports that helped internally motivate them to persist in their postsecondary education and earn a degree for career advancement. During the interview process, attention was focused on the words and body language of the women in the study, and the data was collected and analyzed to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the narratives of these African-American single mothers' experiences.

All of the participants endured difficulties and hardships while pursuing their postsecondary education; however, the external support from family, friends, and community members internally motivated them to persist through their studies and earn degrees for career advancement. Based on their responses, the participants displayed self-efficacy and self-motivation to complete their graduate studies. Self-efficacy "affects people's choice of activities and behavioral settings, how much effort they expend, and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences" (Bandura & Adams, 1977, p. 288). Because of their belief in themselves and others, the women in the study overcame barriers and earned postsecondary

educations to better the lives of themselves and their children. Furthermore, due to the external support from friends and community members, the participants in the study had more access to resources and assistance with caring for their children, which is an example of Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction. The African-American single mothers in the study formed relationships with friends and community members who were willing to help them because of their hard work ethic and determination to succeed for the lives of their children.

When asked about their experiences as single mothers and college students, the participants revealed the barriers they encountered, which were inadequate childcare, lack of resources and money, and using government assistance to care for their children while attending college; in addition, they provided first-hand experience of how it is being an African-American single mother and college student. They explained the judgmental comments some people from their community expressed about them being single parents. The family, friends, and community members who supported them instilled an expectation in the participants, which caused them to overcome hindrances and earn a postsecondary education. The women talked about sacrifices they made to persist in their education and the effects of college and single parenting on their mental and emotional lives; moreover, they expressed the strategies they used to complete their college requirements and to care for their children. The motivation to earn a college degree did not stop at an undergraduate degree, for the participants continued their education by earning other degrees.

Although the participants in the study were self-motivated academically, external motivation came from their children, and all of them agreed that they wanted to give their children better lives and not have them struggle financially or emotionally because of the decisions they made at a young age. The women were inspired primarily by their children, and

secondarily by external motivations, such as family, friends, and community members; however, some of the motivation came from the stereotypes cast on them by people who doubted them because they were young single mothers. Stereotypes are “category-based traits or attributes that are often applied to a group of people as a result of accepted beliefs about the members of the group” (Koch, D’Mello, & Sackett, 2015, p. 129); negative stereotypes can “interfere with the performance of their targets by inducing a self evaluative threat, leading to a level of performance that is not commensurate with their true ability” (Fogliati & Bussey, 2013, p. 310).

The women in the study explained the hurtful comments made about and to them by some community members and extended family members, and how the comments produced self-blame and humiliation. Some of the comments about the participants, such as living a ghetto lifestyle, being promiscuous, never amounting to anything, and living the same unstable life as other family members, made the participants feel isolated and bad about themselves, but instead of negatively affecting their motivation to succeed, those comments elevated their motivation to prove to the naysayers that they were not statistics.

Based on each participant’s personal experiences of being an African-American single mother and college student, there is clarity and understanding of the multiple identities they inhabited and how they intersect daily. Intersectionality helped with recognizing the multiple roles or identities the participants in the study had to display in their daily lives. The participants in the study received discrimination for being young mothers and African-American, because of the high rate of unplanned pregnancies within this race, and they were victims of stereotyping because of being teenage mothers and African-American, because most of the negative comments from people in their community were related to the jezebel and welfare queen categorizations created and established by Whites. Due to the intersecting identities and the

negative comments from people, the women in the study endured marginalization from their community.

### **Implications**

Several implications from this qualitative study surfaced in the research on women who are single mothers. The purpose of the study was to detail the experiences of African-American single mothers as college students. The results of the study aspire to improve the lives of others who share similar situations and help colleges and universities better accommodate single parents on campus.

### **Family**

The primary people who assisted most of the women in the study were family, and their mothers were recognized as being the main external support in caring for children while the participants attended college. Others gave external support with the children, but their mothers supported them either financially, physically, or both. The women indicated that a strong family structure was necessary for them to complete their studies and earn their postsecondary degree.

Although their family was available for the care of their children, the participants did not mention their family seeking counseling services for them when they became young single mothers. All the participants commonly used negative words when detailing their experiences being a single mother and a college student, and some of those words were *challenging*, *horrible*, *overwhelming*, and *difficult*. Although their families supported them physically and financially, the participants needed professional and emotional support that their family could not give them. According to The Institute for Women's Policy Research (2014), providing one-on-one guidance and counseling services to young single mothers could help them with "difficulties in school, relationships, work, and parenting, and these professionals may be case managers, teachers,



guidance counselors, or life skills coaches” (p. 40). Guidance and counseling services could have provided supplementary external support for the participants, and these supports could have referred them to resources unknown to the young mothers and their families.

#### Secondary Administrators

The participants in the study expressed assistance from faculty and staff in their secondary education who helped in various ways. Some of the high schools the participants attended had job opportunities, parenting training, and childcare services, and counselors and teachers motivated them to complete their studies. All of the women discussed the stereotypical and hurtful, demeaning comments made by their peers about their pregnancy; comments such as *hoe, been around the block early*, and *loose* negatively affected some of the participants’ self-esteem and self-worth. None of the women had a peer support group of single pregnant females who could assist with coping with others’ negativity about their circumstances. Peer support consists of “individuals who are not part of the client’s own embedded network, who possess experiential knowledge of the targeted behavior and similar qualities in order to aid the client during a time of actual or potential stress” (Renfrew, McCormick, Wade, Quinn, & Dowswell, 2012, p. 13), and this external support could help with stress and self-esteem issues of teenage mothers. Finding females who shared the same experiences with the participants could have provided advice on coping mechanisms and stress, as well as resources unknown to them; likewise, peer support groups could establish lifelong relationships because of the commonality shared among them.

#### Postsecondary Administrators

Some of the participants received assistance with childcare from the college or university they attended and some of the faculty at the colleges allowed the women to bring their children

to class when no childcare was available. Two participants in the study had daycares and support groups accessible for their needs at their colleges. Because of the community support from their schools, the women in the study had the ability to persist in their postsecondary education.

Although the women in the study had assistance from the faculty and staff of their colleges and universities, none of them received any help from academic advisors and mentors, and most of the participants did not utilize peer support programs and groups specifically for single parents. Based on their time constraints, the women in the study only had time to attend classes, and they did not have the opportunity to become actively involved with the supports the colleges and universities had to offer; moreover, since their time schedules were limited, colleges and universities need to be more accommodating to their needs. Colleges and universities could utilize technology and social media options to reach out to single parent college students. For academic advising, colleges and universities could use e-advising to connect with their students who do not have extra time to come on campus between business hours and meet with advisors and mentors. E-advising is “advising and counseling activities mediated by technology” (Karp, 2013, p. 17-18), and with this service, students receive email updates about events and available resources on campus, counseling services via web, and identification if they have academic needs. This option is accommodating and time efficient for single parents who cannot address academic concerns on campus.

In addition to a lack of assistance from advisors or mentors, only a couple of the participants had the advantage of childcare services on campus, a support that lessened the burden of searching for babysitters in order to attend classes. Most of the other women had to depend on others for childcare or take their children to class with them, and they were sometimes stressed and frustrated with either finding reliable childcare or going through demanding ordeals

to get their child to their care provider. Childcare was one of the major barriers the participants faced, and having childcare services on campus would be an excellent accommodation for single mothers, as it would “lower the attrition rate, increase the retention rate, and increase funding into the university” (Brown & Nichols, 2013, p. 504), and allow single mothers the chance to persist and complete their postsecondary education for career advancement.

### **Future Research**

This study concentrated on the experiences of African-American single mothers while persisting in their postsecondary education, but further research is needed that should focus on multiple races to determine if there are similarities or differences with other nationalities’ experiences. Research showed that “50% of Hispanics and 27% of Whites experience unplanned pregnancies; however, the African-American community is under close watch in this area because of their percentage being 71%” (Dilworth & Arnett, 2012, p. 247-248). Furthermore, the barriers of single motherhood could be different based on race due to White privilege, because Whites have an “unearned advantage and conferred dominance over other races” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 168), which could result in their receiving more external support from their communities, faculty and staff of the colleges and universities they attend, and the government. Additional research is needed to determine if the percentage of unplanned pregnancies of Whites is accurate or if some are concealed due to an unearned privilege, because this invisible knapsack “protects them from negative societal mistreatment” (Wise, 2014, p. 2) and focuses on shaming minority races to make them look superior.

Secondly, the research on single parenting and college persistence needs to consider single fathers who raise their children without the mother being involved, because the single father rate increased “from 1.3% in 1960 to 3.7% in 2009” (Coles, 2015, p. 144); experiences

with external support and barriers could differ between genders. Literature on single fathers concentrates on their parental involvement and their transition to becoming a single parent, but little research exists about them pursuing postsecondary education for better career advancement. Research needs to investigate single fathers' college persistence and postsecondary completion, as well as their experience as single parents and college students.

Lastly, further research is needed regarding the strategies colleges and universities implement to accommodate single parents and their inflexibility of their lives and schedules. The study participants indicated that only two had experienced the availability of childcare on their college campuses, while the others had to search for family members and friends to monitor their children while in class; some colleges and universities have the means to offer daycare services to their single parents student while many do not provided childcare services due to the "budget cuts resulting from the economic recession that began in 2007" (The Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2011, p. 18). Since funding is the primary reason for the lack of childcare on college campuses, researchers need to uncover what other options are available for single parents who have trouble attending on-campus classes due to insufficient childcare. Likewise, examination is necessary to determine how colleges and universities promote external supports on campus for single parents. Some single parents do not take advantage of the assistance on college campuses because they are unaware that it exists. Research on what methods of promotion prove effective and provide results for disseminating information to single parents could assist other colleges and universities that have nothing in place for them.

### **Conclusion**

The eight women in the study earned their undergraduate degree and pursued postsecondary education to earn master's and PhDs in different professional areas. They worked

on advanced degrees for the betterment of their children and the internal satisfaction of their achievements. This study is an example of self-efficacy and motivation, because these women were externally motivated by the people who were there to assist them with their children, and they were internally motivated by the want to provide a better life for their children. The people who supported the participants believed in them and knew they would be successful, and because of that external belief, the women persisted in their education. Because of their determination and ambition, the participants did not allow life factors to deter them from their goal, to complete their postsecondary education.

The primary reason for the study was to prove that all African-American single mothers are not the stereotypical images of welfare queens and jezebels as they have been portrayed; moreover, this study showed that many African-American single mothers do not settle for mediocrity and handouts. These successful African-American single mothers did not make excuses but rather they found ways to complete their postsecondary education because they knew they had children depending upon them. These women are examples of not allowing their designation as young single mothers determine their future.

### **Limitations**

While completing this study, limitations surfaced. The first limitation was participant selection, because some African-American single mothers initially were willing to participate in the study but did not return the required forms by the deadline. Calls were made and emails were sent, however, they did not respond.

Another limitation was scheduling the interviews around the participants' schedules, as they were both college students and single mothers. Discussion of and modification of interview times and conflicts accommodated the interviewees' time and busy lifestyles.

Another limitation was the face-to-face interview, because some of the participants lived in different states. The local women completed face-to-face interviewing, and their responses as well as their body language provided valuable information throughout the interviews; the others had to complete their study virtually where the body language was not fully visible. The face-to-face is preferred method in interviewing, but because the study extended nationwide and the participants were from various states, virtual interviewing was the best solution.

The final limitation was member checking; because some of the participants took extensive time to review the transcriptions of their interviews, the analysis was delayed as was the interpretation of the study. Their busy lives being college students and single mothers delayed them from sending the transcriptions back in a timely fashion. Emails and phone calls made to the participants reminded them to complete the review of the transcriptions.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**CONSENT FORM FOR A NON-CLINICAL STUDY**

1. Study Title: African-American Single Mothers' Experiences While Furthering Their Education

2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College 3.

Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study: Dr. Kenny

Fasching-Varner: 225-916-7615 Kimberly R. James: 225-443-0066

4. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences African-American single mothers encountered while completing their post-secondary education.

5. Subject Inclusion: Individuals who experienced childbirth during their teenage years and continued with post-secondary education.

6. Number of subjects: 8

7. Study Procedures: The participants were gathered by networking with the community about the study and the criteria. After the participants agreed to take part in the study, they completed a participant information form and signed a consent form. They were made aware that they would remain anonymous and pseudo names will be used throughout the study. The interview will be recorded.

8. Benefits: Subjects will receive a gift for participating in the study.

9. Risks: The only study risk is the inadvertent release of sensitive information found in the interview. However, every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigator has access.

10. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

11. Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

12. Signatures: The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb). I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**  
**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM**

Please, fill out the information below. Although I am asking for your full name, you will remain anonymous throughout the study and a pseudo name will be provided as identification in the study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Hometown: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest Level of Education (Circle One):   Associates       Bachelors       Masters       Doctorate

Age of when you gave birth to your child: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Age of Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_       Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX C**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Hello. My name is Kimberly James, and I am the researcher for this study. I received a copy of your consent form and your participant information form, and since both forms are signed, we can continue with the interview. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes, and it will be audio recorded. Your information will remain confidential, and pseudo names will be utilized to identify you throughout the study. Based on the consent form you signed, your participation is voluntary, and the interview will end at any time you feel uncomfortable with the type of questions asked. In addition, you will receive compensation for your contribution. The interview questions are related to the nature of the study, and this study will not cause any physical harm to you. Thank you so much for your participation in the study, and I will begin the recording at this time.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Explain your life being a single mother.
2. Explain your experiences being a single mother in high school.
3. What were your experiences with the faculty and staff in high school?
4. Explain your interactions with your classmates in high school.
5. Explain your experiences being a single mother and a college student?
6. What were your experiences with the faculty and staff in college?
7. Explain your experiences with your peers in college.
8. Explain the external supports you received while being a single mother.
9. Explain what motivated you to persist in your postsecondary education.
10. What advice would you give other African-American single mothers who share the same experiences?

**APPENDIX E  
IRB APPROVAL**

**RE:** IRB# E9595  
**TITLE:** AFRICAN-AMERICAN SINGLE MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES WHILE  
FURTHERING THEIR EDUCATION

**New Protocol/Modification/Continuation:** Modification

**Brief Modification Description:** Change title of study

**Review date:** 10/26/2016

**Approved**     X     **Disapproved**                     

**Approval Date:** 10/26/2016

**Approval Expiration Date:** 10/22/2018

**Re-review frequency:** (three years unless otherwise stated)

**LSU Proposal Number** (if applicable):

**Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal:** (if applicable)

**By:** Dennis Landin, Chairman 

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –  
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: Make sure you use bcc when emailing more than one recipient. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.**

*\*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*



**APPENDIX F**  
**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM DATA TABLE**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Current Age</b>	<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Current Location</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Age when First Child was Birthed</b>	<b>Current Age of Child</b>
Beth	26	Geismar, LA	Baton Rouge, LA	Bachelors	16	10
Kathy	35	Baton Rouge, LA	Baton Rouge, LA	Bachelors	17	18
Samantha	36	Opelousas, LA	Zachary, LA	Masters	17	18
Diane	36	Opelousas, LA	Houston, TX	Masters	16	19
Lisa	37	Flint, MI	Novi, MI	Education Specialist	17	19
Tammy	51	Flint, MI	Flint, MI	Masters	16	35
Betty	59	Belzoni, MS	Byram, MS	Bachelors	16	42
Jessica	59	Westland, MI	Inkster, MI	Masters	16	44

## **VITA**

Kimberly Rayshun James is a native from Jackson, Mississippi, and she earned her Bachelor's Degree in English at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. She continued her studies at Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi and obtained her Master's Degree in Education. She moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 2014 and was accepted at Louisiana State University to complete her doctoral studies in Educational Leadership and Research. She anticipates graduating with her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Educational Leadership and Research in December 2016.